New South Wales Auditor-General’s Report
Performance Audit
Therapeutic Programs in Prisons
Department of Justice
Corrective Services NSW
The role of the Auditor-General

The roles and responsibilities of the Auditor-General, and hence the Audit Office, are set out in the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983. Our major responsibility is to conduct financial or ‘attest’ audits of State public sector agencies’ financial statements. We also audit the Total State Sector Accounts, a consolidation of all agencies’ accounts.

Financial audits are designed to add credibility to financial statements, enhancing their value to end-users. Also, the existence of such audits provides a constant stimulus to agencies to ensure sound financial management.

Following a financial audit the Audit Office issues a variety of reports to agencies and reports periodically to parliament. In combination these reports give opinions on the truth and fairness of financial statements, and comment on agency compliance with certain laws, regulations and government directives. They may comment on financial prudence, probity and waste, and recommend operational improvements.

We also conduct performance audits. These examine whether an agency is carrying out its activities effectively and doing so economically and efficiently and in compliance with relevant laws. Audits may cover all or parts of an agency’s operations, or consider particular issues across a number of agencies.

As well as financial and performance audits, the Auditor-General carries out special reviews and compliance engagements.

Performance audits are reported separately, with all other audits included in one of the regular volumes of the Auditor-General’s Reports to Parliament – Financial Audits.

audit.nsw.gov.au
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges for Corrective Services NSW</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of new programs in 2015</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional funding to reduce reoffending in 2017</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services provided to prisoners</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About this audit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key findings</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Are relevant programs to address reoffending available?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are programs accessible to prisoners?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are programs effective in reducing reoffending behaviour?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendices</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Response from Department of Justice</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Response from the Audit Office</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: About the audit</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance auditing</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary

When a prisoner enters custody in New South Wales, there is an expectation that they will be offered therapeutic programs that reduce their risk of reoffending. Relative to the costs of providing them, these programs have wide-ranging benefits for prisoners and the broader community, and provide significant savings to the justice system. Corrective Services NSW has lead responsibility for ensuring relevant and effective programs are provided, and for the Premier’s Priority of reducing reoffending by five per cent by 2019.

In New South Wales, a significant majority of people convicted of an offence will eventually be reconvicted. Of those convicted of an offence in 2004, 79 per cent had been reconvicted of another offence by 2014 – half within the first year of their initial offence. The total cost to the community of reoffending is difficult to fully quantify. However, the potential to reduce costs to the prisons system alone by reducing reoffending is significant given the average costs of a prison stay is $167 per prisoner per day over an average 218 day sentence. Total prison system costs in New South Wales were $720 million in 2016.

To help achieve its mandate to reduce reoffending, Corrective Services NSW delivers therapeutic programs in prison and the community, along with a range of vocational, education, supervision, case management and health and wellbeing general services. These programs and services contribute to the central goal of reducing the likelihood that prisoners will return to prison. This audit assessed whether selected therapeutic programs are available, accessible and effective in reducing the risk of reoffending. More detailed information on the programs selected is in Appendix 3.

---

1 Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia (2012).
In 2015–16, 75 per cent of prisoners with an identified program need did not complete a program prior to the earliest parole date. If prisoners do not complete programs before their earliest parole date, they can be released having had no, or incomplete, interventions while in prison to address their offending. They can also be refused parole by the State Parole Authority, adding unnecessary length to the time spent in jail and exacerbating overcrowding. Parole refusal data from the State Parole Authority indicates that non-completion of programs was a factor in 84 per cent of 302 parole refusals in 2015.

Program resourcing at the prison level is inadequate to meet increased demand

Lack of availability of programs to meet demand is a key factor preventing prisoners from completing programs in time for release. The 20 per cent increase in the prison population between 2011–12 and 2015–16 has placed a significant strain on resources. While more programs are being delivered, the overall proportion of prisoners receiving programs before release has not. Prisoner case management is not performed in a timely and consistent way, resulting in prisoners missing opportunities to be referred to programs, particularly if they have shorter sentences. For example, 27 per cent of prisoners with more than six months to serve had not completed an assessment required to determine eligibility for an EQUIP S program in the past four years.

The mix of available programs may be out of step with the needs of some prisoners

Since 2012, Corrective Services NSW has increased the number of moderate-intensity EQUIPS domestic violence and aggression programs provided and more prisoners overall are now able to participate in programs. Over the same period, the number of intensive programs
delivered for sex offenders has decreased and the number of intensive programs for serious violent offenders has remained the same. This is despite increasing proportions of prisoners sentenced for sexual assault and related offences, and serious violent offences.

Corrective Services NSW uses a risk-assessment model to determine which prisoners are eligible for existing programs, but does not regularly review whether there are gaps or insufficient program coverage of some therapeutic needs.

Corrective Services NSW does not collect robust and comparable information on program quality and outcomes

Program performance reporting at the prison level focuses on program throughput, such as the number of programs delivered and the number of prisoners participating. Corrective Services NSW does not routinely collect information on program implementation that would provide insights at the prison level into whether programs are being run effectively, and are achieving their intended goals.

Corrective Services NSW has not systematically evaluated its therapeutic programs to confirm they are effective in reducing reoffending

Programs being delivered in New South Wales prisons are based on international evidence about the success of the specific methods and approaches used. This is a good foundation, but Corrective Services NSW is unable to show that its programs are effective in the New South Wales context, and that they are having an impact in achieving the Premier’s target of reducing reoffending by five per cent. Evaluations of some programs have been conducted, but these were mostly inconclusive because of challenges with data collection, such as developing significant enough sample sizes. A lack of consistent forward planning has also affected the rigour of some evaluations.

With the roll out of an additional $237 million investment in reducing reoffending, Corrective Services NSW proposes to focus efforts on evaluating the effectiveness of its programs by engaging external experts and increasing resourcing in its own evaluation unit. A systematic forward program for independent evaluation, which identifies solutions to existing data gaps and builds on past studies, is needed to support this.

Recommendations

Corrective Services NSW should by December 2017:

1. Implement a systematic approach to the use of convictions, sentencing and case management data to ensure that gaps in program offerings can be identified and addressed.

By June 2018:

2. Clearly establish program delivery staff resourcing benchmarks, based on individual prison profiles, that would meet demand and ensure prisoners receive timely assessments, comprehensive case management and relevant programs before the earliest date they can be released.

3. Establish consistent program quality and outcomes performance indicators at the prison-level, and monitor and respond to these quarterly.

4. Develop and implement a detailed forward program of independent evaluations for all prison-based therapeutic programs, that includes identified data requirements for prisons to collect and provide.
Introduction

Challenges for Corrective Services NSW

Corrective Services NSW, a division of the Department of Justice, operates 34 custodial correctional centres across New South Wales, including two that are managed by private companies. It is responsible for delivering correctional services and programs that reduce reoffending and enhance community safety. Corrective Services NSW has lead responsibility for the Premier’s Priority of reducing adult reoffending by five per cent by 2019. To assist in achieving this target, Corrective Services NSW delivers therapeutic programs in prisons that aim to reduce the likelihood that prisoners will reoffend once released.

Prison overcrowding

Prior to 2011, the prison population had been decreasing, which resulted in the closure of Berrima, Parramatta and Kirkconnell Correctional Centres, the downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre, and a reduction in total capacity of 900 beds. However, since 2011–12 the prison population has increased by approximately 30 per cent, reaching a record of around 12,900 prisoners in March 2017 (latest available data).

Exhibit 1: Adult prison population, 2011–2016

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research attributed this increase to:

- increases in police initiating criminal proceedings against people who are likely to be denied bail
- increased time on remand
- increases in police initiating criminal proceedings against offenders who are more likely to be imprisoned if convicted
- a higher percentage of offenders receiving a prison sentence if convicted of multiple offences.
The increase in the prison population has had impacts across the prison system, as reported by the Inspector of Custodial Services in an April 2015 report, 'Full House: The growth of the inmate population in NSW'. These impacts relate to security and safety, health and wellbeing and resources and services. The Inspector’s report specifically noted that (p10):

Rehabilitation outcomes are also compromised when inmate numbers are increased without a commensurate increase in appropriate resources. Overcrowding limits opportunities for parole, because access to required programs is constrained.

High rates of reoffending and multiple issues affecting offending behaviour

Offenders who have committed violent assaults, sexual assaults, and drug offences together make up more than half the prison population (see Exhibit 2). The overall rate of reoffending for these offence categories is 63 per cent for assaults, 42 per cent for sexual assaults, and 63 per cent for drug offences (Exhibit 3).

Many of the issues associated with crime and reoffending, including poverty, unstable housing, and drug and alcohol use, are to some degree outside of the prison system’s scope to fully address. However, prison provides an important opportunity for the criminal justice system to have an impact on the lives of prisoners while they are in direct contact with them. Research has demonstrated that prison time alone has no effect, or even a negative effect, on reducing the likelihood that prisoners will reoffend. In order to reduce this likelihood, prisons can address offending behaviour with therapeutic programs and effect change in prisoners’ lives, while also attending to their general health, safety, vocational and educational needs.

Exhibit 2 – Adult sentenced population by most serious offence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Type</th>
<th>31 March 2016</th>
<th>30 June 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicide and related offences</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent assaults</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>1,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous/negligent acts</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction/harassment</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery/extortion</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud/deception</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug offences</td>
<td>1,110</td>
<td>1,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons offences</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property damage</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public order offences</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic offences</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice procedures offences</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>1,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,300</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,380</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.
Introduction of new programs in 2015

Prior to 2015, Corrective Services NSW delivered a wide range of programs to address issues such as substance abuse, anger management and domestic violence. Corrective Services NSW reviewed these programs in 2013, with the aim of better allocating program resources across the prison population to ensure that reoffending risks were being effectively addressed. As a result of this review, Corrective Services NSW replaced most existing programs with a new set of four moderate intensity therapeutic programs, known as EQUIPS, which all follow the same general structure and format. EQUIPS programs address violence, domestic violence, addiction and general offending.

Corrective Services NSW delivers each of these programs over 20 sessions with the same concepts repeated to reinforce and build on skills as prisoners move through each session. Because they are consistent in approach, prisoners can complete a single program or multiple programs to increase the intensity of treatment provided. For example, participation in three of the programs would meet the therapeutic needs for an average medium/medium-high risk offender.

Additional funding to reduce reoffending in 2017

In August 2016, the NSW Government announced an additional $237 million investment in reducing reoffending. The announcement stated that the funding would target ‘persistent domestic violence defendants and other high-risk offenders and ensure that inmates serving sentences of six months or less for any crime participate in rehabilitation programs.’ Corrective Services NSW has developed an implementation plan which focuses on:

- improving supervision and case management processes
- establishing ten high intensity program units for prisoners serving short sentences
- and on enhancing evaluation capability.

---

3 EQUIPS stands for Explore, Question, Understand, Investigate, Practise, Succeed.
Currently, case management is performed by staff in addition to their other duties. Corrective Services NSW has stated that additional funding will be used to recruit 157 new case management officers whose sole purpose will be to ensure that prisoners complete recommended actions in their case plans which includes participation in rehabilitative programs.

Corrective Services NSW will also establish ten high intensity program units targeting prisoners serving six months or less who would previously have no access to therapeutic programs. Corrective Services NSW anticipates these ten additional units will treat up 1,200 inmates each year. Two of these units will be dedicated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, and two will be for female prisoners.

Corrective Services NSW proposes to allocate funding to engaging external providers to develop an evaluation framework and complete evaluations of implementation plan activities. Funding will also be allocated to increasing the capacity of Corrective Services NSW’s own evaluation unit to improve data management processes.

Because these initiatives were in the early stages of implementation during our audit, we cannot comment in detail on whether they are likely to address issues raised in this report. However, our findings are broadly relevant to the continued roll out of these initiatives, including:

- the importance of comprehensive and data-driven, independent program evaluation
- the importance of systematically monitoring trends in the prison population to ensure newly introduced programs address prevailing prisoner needs
- the need for program resources to be commensurate with the size of the prison population and allocated based on clear, prison-level resource benchmarks
- the need for prisons to report on robust process and outcome performance indicators on program targeting and impact, including at the prison level.

Other services provided to prisoners

Although the focus of this report is on selected therapeutic programs, such programs are part of a wider suite of initiatives, programs and services which all have the potential to impact on the likelihood prisoners will reoffend.

Along with therapeutic programs, Corrective Services NSW also provides prisoners with work, education and vocational training opportunities, and post-release supervision and support. These services aim to help prisoners address barriers to education and employment and increase their chances of successfully re-integrating into the community on release. Corrective Services NSW also provides preparatory and wellbeing programs including Mothering at a Distance and Real Understanding of Self Help.

About this audit

This audit assessed whether prison programs are available, accessible and effective in reducing reoffending. During the audit, we examined Corrective Services NSW data, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data and other relevant literature. We also interviewed Corrective Services NSW head office and operational staff, and members of prisoner and victims of crime advocacy groups.

We focused on seven programs which address offending behaviour exhibited by more than half of the prison population and because the rate of reoffending for the offences they aim to address is also high. They included four moderate intensity therapeutic programs offered in prison, known as EQUIPS, that address addiction, aggression, domestic abuse, and general offending. We also examined higher intensity programs offered in dedicated residential units within prisons to address drug and alcohol addiction, sex offending and violent offending.

Corrective Services NSW intends that these programs can be accessed by any prisoner deemed eligible and suitable. This could include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, and prisoners with complex needs such as intellectual disability and mental illness.
We did not seek to examine the effectiveness of these programs for specific populations. However, the broad findings of this report include representation of people with more complex needs who access the programs we have included in our scope.

Details of the programs selected for the audit is in Appendix 3. Further information on the audit scope and criteria is at Appendix 3. Corrective Services NSW’s response to this report is at Appendix 1.
Key findings

1. Are relevant programs to address reoffending available?

Following the introduction of EQUIPS programs, more prisoners can participate in programs, but there are gaps in coverage of some specific therapeutic needs.

Corrective Services NSW provides a range of programs that address reoffending, including addiction, aggression, violence, and sex offender programs. These include high intensity programs, as well as shorter, moderate-intensity EQUIPS programs.

Since 2015, prisons have been providing more moderate-intensity EQUIPS programs, and this has resulted in more prisoners having access to programs. However, over the past three years, there has been a decrease in the number of high intensity programs, despite increasing numbers of prisoners convicted of serious offences that may need them. While Corrective Services NSW has a clear rationale for the therapeutic benefit of the current mix of programs to the prisoners who are eligible for them, there may be gaps and insufficient program coverage for particular groups of offenders such as sex offenders and serious violent offenders who require higher intensity programs.

Corrective Services NSW’s assessment and case management processes aim to match an offender to the level of treatment needed and ensure prisoners receive relevant programs. However, there are often delays with prisoner assessments and there is also a lack of coordination and accountability in the case management process. These issues impact on the likelihood that prisoners will receive an appropriate program before they are due for release.

Recommendations

Corrective Services NSW should:

- Implement a systematic approach to the use of convictions, sentencing and case management data to ensure that gaps in program offerings can be identified and addressed.

1.1 Moderate intensity programs have increased but there may be gaps in program coverage for some prisoners

Eligible prisoners can more readily access moderate-intensity programs, but there may be gaps in coverage for sex offenders and serious violent offenders

Corrective Services NSW provides a broad range of programs to meet the therapeutic needs of the prison population. However, in terms of the number of programs run, higher-intensity programs have reduced or maintained at current levels over the past three years despite relative increases in serious violent and sexual offenders, for whom these programs are often recommended.

There has been extensive resourcing for new programs, such as the EQUIPS general offending program. This program caters for all offenders, excluding sex offenders, who are assessed as being medium to high risk of reoffending.

Corrective Services NSW has also allocated staffing and resources to provide a greater number of EQUIPS offence-specific programs, including:

- a 52 per cent increase in the number of EQUIPS aggression programs delivered in the past four years
- a 160 per cent increase in the number of EQUIPS domestic violence programs delivered in the past four years.

This shift in approach resulted from a 2013 review which intended to better align program resourcing and scope with reoffending risk levels.
In the same period, there has been a reduction in the number of intensive programs for prisoners who have committed more serious offences. These programs are longer, require more intensive prisoner participation and are provided in a separate residential unit – allowing for focussed therapy and isolation from the general prison population for safety reasons.

In the last three years, there has been a 34 per cent decrease in the number of intensive sex offender programs run, and the number of programs run for serious violent offenders has remained the same. This is despite a 26 per cent increase in the number of sex offenders and a 24 per cent increase in the number of violent offenders convicted over the past four years. Not all of these additional prisoners will require higher intensity programs, however, reducing these programs while the prison population increases potentially compromises rehabilitation outcomes by denying intensive support to increasing numbers of inmates most in need of it.

**Sex offenders have limited access to moderate intensity programs**

Unlike other medium-risk inmates, medium-risk sex offenders are not able to participate in all EQUIPS programs because of safety concerns posed by other inmates arising from the nature of their offence. This means the only programs they are eligible for are the EQUIPS addiction program (because this is the only EQUIPS program that does not require discussing the nature of their offence), the Custody-based Intensive Treatment (CUBIT) sex offender program, which is offered to moderate to high risk sex offenders, and the low to moderate risk sex offender program, CUBIT-outreach (CORE).

Sex-offender specific programs are only offered in limited places because they must be delivered in a separate unit within prison, which allows for focussed therapy in a safe environment. The overall effect of these issues is that the availability of programs for sex offenders is limited as compared to other program types. Corrective Services NSW was not able to provide data on the overall proportion of sex offenders who complete any relevant programs before release, and so the impact of this issue is unquantified. However, Corrective Services NSW data indicate that 16.5 per cent of sex offenders participated in non-sex-offender specific programs prior to their release from prison in 2016.

**1.2 Assessments of prisoners’ program needs are critical but are not always completed in a timely way**

Assessments are the first step in the offender rehabilitation process. They play a vital role in determining which prisoners should be targeted for a program, and which programs a prisoner should engage in. Corrective Services NSW uses two main assessments as part of this process:

- The Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) assessment tool identifies an offender’s general risk of reoffending once they are released, and the criminogenic factors that should be targeted in their treatment
- the Static-99 is an alternative assessment tool for sex offenders, as the LSI-R is not a valid assessment to predict the risk of sexual reoffending.

These assessments are based on international research on the success of programs that target offenders according to their risk of reoffending, and which tailor interventions to the individual learning needs of the offender. Corrective Services NSW identifies prisoners who are eligible for programs based on the results of these assessments. Inmates assessed as medium to high risk are targeted for programs. Corrective Services NSW deliberately does not commit program delivery resources to prisoners who are low risk because risk of reoffending for this population is lower.

According to Corrective Services NSW policy, offenders should be assessed within 12 weeks of their sentence or transfer from one centre to another (for example, when their security classification changes). This enables a case plan to be developed that targets an inmate’s assessed areas of risk. However, we found that Corrective Services NSW staff do not systematically check whether the LSI-R assessments are completed within this timeframe. In many cases prisoners are released before an assessment can be conducted or do not have
enough time in prison to enable an assessment, however, around 27 per cent of inmates had not completed an LSI-R assessment at all in the past four years.

For the sex offender population, we found that 35 per cent had not completed the Static-99 assessment at all in the past four years. Unlike other offenders, trained psychologists administer the Static-99 to sex offenders. Due to resourcing required for this, Corrective Services NSW prioritises this assessment based on how close a prisoner is to their release date. The median time taken to complete the assessment is five months.

Lengthy assessment times lead to delays in case planning, increasing the risk an inmate will miss opportunities for programs and educational activities.

1.3 Case management is poorly coordinated

Poor coordination and gaps in case management can delay prisoner progress

Effective case management encourages communication and responsibility for monitoring a prisoner’s progress towards rehabilitation. Under the service agreement which Corrective Services NSW has with prisons, sentenced inmates should have a case plan developed within 12 weeks of their sentence or from transfer from another prison. The case plan outlines the steps that an inmate is required to take to enable their successful reintegration into the community and to reduce reoffending.

Around 80 per cent of prisoners had their case plan reviewed at the time of their case management meeting. However, Corrective Services NSW does not effectively monitor how frequently these reviews occur, or whether case plans are developed in a timely way. This may result in an inmate missing opportunities to be referred to a program.

During our audit, we identified several problems with how case management is coordinated and performed. These include:

- case plans being developed without input by prisoners
- a disparity between case management policy and the resources available to deliver on this in the correctional centre environment. This leads to case officers sometimes lacking the time to fully adhere to guidelines and requirements
- confusion regarding who is accountable for ensuring that a prisoner’s program needs are met. A survey conducted by the Inspector of Custodial Services found that around 50 per cent of surveyed prisoners did not know who their allocated case officer was.

Addressing these issues would allow the case management process to more effectively monitor prisoner needs and ensure that prisoner program needs are met. This is especially important for prisoners with complex needs, or prisoners who need more targeted interventions, including

- prisoners with intellectual disability and mental illness
- prisoners with low literacy levels
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- women.

As part of the roll-out of additional funding to address reoffending, Corrective Services NSW plans to introduce dedicated case management specialists in correctional centres who will plan interventions throughout the prisoner's sentence pathway including, where applicable, following release under supervision into the community. This has potential to address some of the case management issues that are preventing prisoners from accessing relevant programs in a timely manner.

---

4 All data provided to us by Corrective Services regarding prisoners who have completed LSI-R assessments was for prisoners who have at least six months remaining of their sentence.
2. Are programs accessible to prisoners?

In 2015–16, 75 per cent of prisoners with an identified program need reached the earliest date they could be released on parole without completing a program. These prisoners are often released with no intervention in prison to address their offending, or refused parole and held in prison longer.

Since 2012, the proportion of offenders who complete programs before their earliest release date has increased slowly but remains low at 25 per cent in 2015–16. Corrective Services NSW attempts to prioritise prisoners for programs before their parole period, but program availability is inadequate to meet demand.

A majority of prisoners with an identified program need are being released on court-ordered parole without having completed a program. Of those prisoners refused parole by the State Parole Authority, a majority also have program non-completion as a reason for refusal – potentially exacerbating prison overcrowding by adding unnecessary length to the time prisoners spend in prison.

Program related performance indicators at the prison level focus on outputs, such as the number of programs delivered, number of offenders completing programs and the percentage of offenders completing programs. Detailed information is not collected on the reasons prisoners drop out of programs or do not complete them in time for their earliest release date. More robust process and outcome indicators are needed to provide information on issues affecting program quality, relevance and participation rates.

Recommendations

Corrective Services NSW should:

- Clearly establish program delivery staff resourcing benchmarks, based on individual prison profiles, that would meet demand and ensure prisoners receive timely assessments, comprehensive case management and relevant programs before the earliest date they can be released.
- Establish consistent program quality and outcomes performance indicators at the prison-level, and monitor and respond to these quarterly.

2.1 Most prisoners are not completing programs before their earliest possible release date

In 2015–16, 75 per cent of prisoners with identified program needs reached the earliest date they could be released to parole without completing recommended programs.

Parole is the release of a prisoner from custody to serve the balance of their sentence in the community. According to the State Parole Authority, the purpose of parole is to supervise and support the reintegration of prisoners before the end of their total sentence while providing a continuing measure of protection to the community. Parole can be included as part of a prisoner’s sentence by the court at the time of sentencing (in the case of sentences of less than three years) or by the State Parole Authority (in the case of sentences of more than three years).

Exhibit 4 shows the number of prisoners with one or more program needs leaving prison, and the number of these who completed a program prior to the earliest date on which their parole could have started. The total numbers of prisoners completing programs prior to their earliest release on parole date has increased significantly since 2011–12, reflecting the introduction of more readily available moderate-intensity programs. However, the overall proportions completing programs have remained relatively unchanged since 2012–13, at around a quarter of prisoners.
Exhibit 4 – Prisoners with an identified program need who complete programs before the earliest date they can be released on parole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program completion prior to earliest possible parole date</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of prisoners with an identified program need exiting custody</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>3,176</td>
<td>3,191</td>
<td>3,358</td>
<td>3,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program completion prior to parole (%)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Corrective Services NSW data.

Corrective Services NSW has advised that prisoners who do not complete programs in prison will sometimes do so on release in the community and that, in many cases, this is a more suitable option for people who need support with integration back into their family and community environment. However, it is unclear what proportion of the prisoner population is identified as better suited to completing programs in the community as part of a coordinated case plan, and how many do so, as Corrective Services NSW was not able to provide this information.

Non-completion of programs is a contributing factor in most parole refusals

In 2015, over 6500 prisoners were released on parole. Of these, 973 were released under State Parole Authority parole orders - that is, they were not automatically released on court-based parole at the end of their non-parole period. In addition to these parole releases, 302 prisoners were refused parole by the State Parole Authority.

Completing a program is usually a pre-condition of parole for prisoners sentenced to more than three years in prison, as they are likely to have a more serious offending history and are in prison long enough to have completed therapeutic programs to address their offending. The State Parole Authority generally prefers prisoners to complete programs in prison, rather than in the community, so that they can decide whether to grant parole based on a prisoner’s demonstrated behaviour and participation in rehabilitation while in prison.

In 2015, failure to complete a program was listed as a contributing reason in 84 per cent of incidents of parole refusal by the State Parole Authority (Exhibit 5), failure to complete a program was listed as a contributing reason for parole refusal. In 56 per cent of cases, the prisoner had one program need that was unaddressed, 22 per cent had two program needs unaddressed, and 6 per cent had three program needs unaddressed. The most commonly unaddressed needs (Exhibit 6) were addiction (34 per cent) aggression (32 per cent) and sex offending (21 per cent).

Exhibit 5 – Number of unaddressed program needs identified in parole refusals, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program needs unaddressed</th>
<th>Number of prisoners</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 State Parole Authority Data.
Exhibit 6 – Unaddressed program needs identified in parole refusals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program needs unaddressed</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex offending</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General offending</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>357</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 State Parole Authority Data.

Participation in programs is voluntary and not all prisoners agree to participate in programs before the expiry of their non-parole period. We were advised by the State Parole Authority and Corrective Services NSW that prisoner motivation to participate in programs is a key issue affecting rates of program completion, and that often prisoners will be reluctant to participate and eventually only agree once their parole hearing is coming up, or after they have had their parole refused at least once.

We are not able to differentiate the proportions of prisoners who did not complete programs because they were not provided in time, from those who refused to participate, because Corrective Services NSW does not collect detailed enough information on this. That said, given between 300 and 400 prisoners are refused parole by the State Parole Authority each year, parole refusal because of program non-completion in this group is potentially adding unnecessary length to sentences and exacerbating prison overcrowding.

**Only 20 per cent of prisoners eligible for programs complete them prior to court based parole**

In the case of court based parole, the court sets the non-parole period for prisoners sentenced to less than three years. At the expiry of the non-parole period, prisoners are released on parole subject to standard conditions and any additional conditions required by the court.

In 2016, only 20 per cent of prisoners with a program need completed a program before being released on court based parole.

Out of 5,714 prisoners released on court based parole, approximately half were eligible for programs. Of these, 46 per cent participated in programs and 20 per cent completed them before they were released.

**There is a systematic process for prioritising prisoners for EQUIPS programs, but not for intensive programs**

Corrective Services NSW prioritises prisoners for EQUIPS programs based on the time remaining on their sentence. The policy provides clear direction in several areas, including eligibility for programs, scheduling processes, and roles and responsibilities of staff. The four EQUIPS programs each have their own candidate lists. These lists are updated weekly and identify candidates who have a medium to high risk rating and between three months and two years until their parole period. It is possible for prisoners to appear on all four lists. When this occurs, the policy provides guidance on how to prioritise prisoner needs through a decision tree. All program deliverers we interviewed were aware of this process and reported that it was clear and adhered to.

Corrective Services NSW has a policy that provide guidance on the referral and eligibility process for intensive CUBIT and violent offender (VOTP) programs, however, there is no formal guidance for managing referrals to the Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (IDATP). Unlike the EQUIPS programs, the referral process for intensive programs is not driven by systematic prioritising of prisoners by release date though sentence time remaining is usually a key consideration in referring prisoners to these programs when places become available.
The reasons prisoners do not complete programs are unclear

Programs need to be fully completed to be most effective in reducing offending behaviour. Corrective Services NSW does not systematically collect robust data on the reasons prisoners who start programs do not complete them. Information from limited evaluations of prior programs suggests that these reasons could include program suitability (for example, to address low literacy levels and cultural appropriateness), prisoner motivation, past lack of engagement in education or work, disruptive behaviour and mental health issues.

Prisoners may also be frequently moved between prisons during their sentence, for example, because of changes to their security classification. This can affect their participation in programs, particularly if they are moved to a prison that does not offer the programs they need or if their case plan is not regularly followed up to ensure continuity with program participation.

Corrective Services NSW monitors program completion rates and there is significant variation from prison to prison. However, Corrective Services does not collect detailed information on the factors impacting on program completion that would assist in targeting case management responses or resolving other systemic issues.

2.2 Resourcing needs for program delivery are not clearly established

Case management and program delivery functions need clearer delineation for planning and benchmarking purposes

To effectively contribute to achieving the Premier’s Priority to reduce reoffending, program delivery resources need to meet demand for programs. The bulk of therapeutic programs offered in prison have fixed numbers of participants and fixed timeframes over which they are intended to run. The most widely-implemented moderate intensity EQUIPS programs can only be completed start-to-finish by the same group of participants and drop-outs cannot be replaced by new candidates. Given the fixed method and format, there is little opportunity to implement process efficiencies. As such, the only way of meeting additional demand is additional staffing and resources.

Corrective Services NSW currently delivers services under a cluster operating model, which means that program delivery staff may have a wide variety of program and non-program related duties in prisons and the community over a defined geographic area. Corrective Services NSW estimate that 70 per cent of staff time is spent performing duties other than delivering programs, however, there are no resourcing guidelines in place to indicate what percentage of time should be allocated to each activity and what the baseline program delivery staff requirements are to meet demand.

Corrective Services NSW is currently undertaking a benchmarking process to review and better align staffing structures. This new structure may address some of the availability and access issues currently in the system. In the context of the dynamic nature of the prisons system, it can be challenging to establish effective staffing structures that enable day to day issues and problems to be dealt with and resolved, whilst effectively managing program access. Proposed increased resources to specialist case management services may assist with this, and clear delineation of these roles from program delivery functions may help ensure program delivery resources can be focused on their intended purpose.

There are insufficient program delivery rooms

A basic requirement of program delivery is access to a suitable space. Corrective Service NSW’s policy defines a suitable program delivery room as being of sufficient size, free of external disruptions and containing relevant resources. Corrective Services NSW policy also stipulates that program delivery spaces should be fit for purpose to help ensure prisoners stay engaged in treatment.

Program delivery rooms in correctional centres are scarce resources, as they are not only used by program delivery staff but are often also used to deliver education and other services. Staff at prisons consistently told us that a key limitation to more program delivery is the availability of sufficient and suitable program delivery rooms. Staff also indicated that the use
of program delivery rooms could be better coordinated across different service providers in prisons.

Proposed additional funding, announced in 2016, to build ten dedicated program areas may assist to alleviate access issues to program delivery rooms.

2.3 Corrective Services systematically monitors output performance in program delivery, but does not use robust process and outcome-based indicators

Processes are in place to monitor program delivery performance but accountability at the public prison level is unclear

In our 2016 report, 'Performance frameworks in custodial centre operations', we recommended that Corrective Services NSW bring its planning and performance frameworks in line with best practice approaches. We noted that the ability of Corrective Services NSW to manage its performance is limited because organisational performance indicators do not cascade to the public prison level. These issues also affect the management of program delivery performance at the prison level. General program delivery implementation indicators are reported ‘up the chain’ into central performance indicator monitoring, but there appears to be little active management of individual centre planning and performance in this area.

That said, Regional Support Managers for each geographic region meet monthly to raise any issues that have impacted program delivery and discuss ways to address further problems. Senior prison management is involved in this process. Separate monthly meetings are also held with the Program Support Team and other custodial staff members with performance data being used to support issues raised or changes to policy or implementation required.

A different process is in place for private correctional centres (Junee and Parklea) which have detailed operating specifications and performance-linked fees. We visited Junee prison and observed detailed monitoring of program implementation performance.

Corrective Services NSW has advised that a benchmarking and contestability process is underway, which may address some of the issues in the accountability for the performance of public prisons, particularly, the need for relevant, centre-specific performance indicators.

Key performance indicators are process rather than performance driven

Most program performance indicators are focused on the number of programs delivered, the number of prisoners completing programs, and the percentage of prisoners completing programs. For example, performance indicators for EQUIPS programs collected in public and private prisons focus on process issues linked to ensuring a certain level of throughput, rather than ensuring prisoners receive programs identified in their case plans, or that programs delivered in prisons are suitable to the population. Given some of the information gaps on program quality and accessibility discussed in section 2.1, these need to include more quality process and outcome related indicators, for instance:

- the percentage of prisoners completing programs that are specifically identified in case plans to ensure they are receiving relevant interventions
- the proportions of prisoners with complex needs or needs for targeted interventions who complete programs (for example, prisoners with intellectual disability and mental illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, women, prisoners with low literacy levels)
- more specific information on the reasons for program non-completion or non-participation
- the impact that programs have on a participant’s motivation, as measured through post participation feedback
- a participant’s risk of reoffending as measured before and after program delivery.
3. Are programs effective in reducing reoffending behaviour?

Corrective Services NSW does not systematically evaluate its therapeutic prison programs.

Corrective Services NSW bases its program design on a large body of international and national evidence which indicates that rehabilitation programs are more effective in reducing reoffending compared to prison time alone. However, Corrective Services NSW does not currently have a systematic approach to independently testing the quality and effectiveness of programs in the context of its own prison system and population. This, combined with gaps in available data for independent evaluators, means that it is not clear what impact programs are having in reducing reoffending.

Corrective Services NSW’s program delivery is governed by comprehensive guidelines, and training and support is provided to program staff. However, there are some gaps in central oversight of how well programs are being delivered in prisons across the state. This creates a risk that programs are not always delivered according to best practice standards, potentially limiting their effectiveness.

Corrective Services NSW should place a greater focus on ensuring data quality is sufficient to produce more robust, independent evaluations, and on measuring outcomes relating to the impact of programs on prisoners. This would assist Corrective Services NSW to more directly monitor program effectiveness, make any required adjustments to program delivery to improve them, and potentially make further progress towards reducing reoffending.

Recommendations

Corrective Services NSW should:

- Develop and implement a detailed forward program of independent evaluations for all prison-based therapeutic programs, that includes identified data requirements for prisons to collect and provide.

3.1 Programs are evidence-based but not systematically evaluated

Corrective Services NSW’s programs are based on robust international evidence on reoffending and are targeted to the needs of prisoners

Corrective Services NSW has invested significant resources in developing and delivering therapeutic programs in the last ten years. This investment in programs is based on a growing body of Australian and international research which demonstrates that therapeutic programs have a greater impact on reducing reoffending than prison time alone.

The studies have encompassed research investigating the effects of treatment to a range of offender types, including drug and alcohol offenders, sex offenders, and others. Across these, researchers have consistently found a causal link between a well-delivered intervention program and a reduced risk of reoffending. Corrective Services NSW’s programs and its delivery policies are based on this body of evidence.

All the Corrective Services NSW programs we examined have supporting policy documents that set out the broad evidence base for the program, and rationale for how it is to be delivered. For example, the intensive sex offender program is delivered in therapeutic group settings which assists offenders to accept responsibility and become socially accountable for their behaviour. Similarly, most of the programs we examined have an ‘offence mapping’ component, which helps offenders to reflect on the actions leading to their offence, and create a plan to manage their future risk of reoffending.

In determining program eligibility, Corrective Services NSW applies a ‘risk-need-responsivity’ model that has been found to be effective in reducing reoffending. Ensuring prisoners receive an appropriate level of treatment through the guiding principles of this model is cited in
international research as a key method to support rehabilitation and avoid the risk that prisoners can become more likely to reoffend by being exposed to inappropriate or poorly targeted therapies. The principles include aspects such as self-management planning, using therapy groups, and other mechanisms to affect change.

Corrective Services NSW does not have enough evidence to show that program participation reduces reoffending in the NSW context

Despite the strong international research base underpinning its therapeutic programs, Corrective Services NSW has not commenced or completed independent evaluations of the effectiveness of many of its programs in the New South Wales context. The lack of clear evaluation findings means that we cannot determine what impact these programs are having on reducing reoffending.

There are also issues specific to New South Wales and Australia which support the need for local evaluations to confirm programs developed based on international evidence are effective here, including:

- a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners
- a significant proportion of prisoners with complex needs such as mental illness and intellectual disability
- an increasing rate of imprisonment among women, and increasing numbers of women convicted of violent crime.

Some small-scale evaluations and reviews of programs have been completed but their results have limited significance. For example, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) reviewed the impact of the intensive sex offender program, CUBIT, on reoffending among a sample of 386 offenders, and found reasonable evidence that it reduced reoffending overall. However, the sample size and other data quality issues prevented BOCSAR from saying whether this program reduces sexual or violent offending.

Lack of independent evaluation has been a persistent issue in New South Wales and other states, with a 2011 Australian Crime Commission report finding a dearth of evaluations and research reports in any Australian jurisdiction. We also recently noted this is an issue in our 2016 report, ‘Reintegrating young offenders into the community after detention’. We recommended that Juvenile Justice NSW include reintegration outcomes and measures in its next strategic framework so that it clearly sets out and evaluates the results it wants to achieve for young people leaving detention.

A lack of research and evaluations is a not a problem unique to Australia. For example, the United Kingdom has limited evidence on the success of a number of its newer, or difficult to research, therapeutic programs. However, there are also jurisdictions that have some good practice which New South Wales could look to. Correctional Services Canada has been able to collect enough evidence over the past 30 years to demonstrate that its therapeutic programs reduce crime by an average of 29 per cent.

Corrective Services NSW has been asked before to improve its approach evaluating its therapeutic programs. A 2011 New South Wales Commission of Audit Report recommended ‘that the Department of Attorney-General and Justice should evaluate the effectiveness of offender management programs with a view to consolidating and rationalising less effective programs and investing in the more successful ones’. Corrective Services NSW did conduct a review of programs in 2013, with a view to more effectively responding to reoffending risk across the prisoner population. A strategic approach to the independent evaluation of programs should be given priority to ensure that sufficient evidence can be collected over time to demonstrate that investments in this area are achieving value.

---

5 K Heseltine, A Day and R Sarre, Prison-based correctional offender rehabilitation programs: The 2009 national picture in Australia, Australian Institute of Criminology, Research and Public Policy Series No. 112, 2011, p37–38
Data quality is a key issue preventing more robust evaluations

To obtain independent evaluations of programs, Corrective Services NSW provides data to external evaluators, primarily BOCSAR, with which it has a formal partnership to support this work. However, to date there has not been a detailed forward-program of evaluations in place, and the timing of evaluations it commissions has been ad hoc, dependent on resource availability, and on evaluators being able to obtain quality data. Priority given by BOCSAR to prison program evaluations in determining its own program of work is also a factor.

As a result of these issues, evaluations have not often provided relevant information that can assist in ensuring programs are having their desired impact in reducing reoffending. Changes to programs at various times have also created challenges in collecting information on enough prisoners to produce robust findings.

Corrective Services NSW collects a significant amount of prisoner-related information on its Offender Integrated Management System. This database includes numerous prisoner case-management and program participation items. However, the system currently does not collect specific enough information to give independent researchers a clear picture of why some prisoners do not participate in programs. This is needed to find comparable control groups of prisoners who have not completed programs, so that reoffending rates can be accurately compared between prisoners who have and have not completed programs. Data gaps include information on prisoners’ motivation, and why some prisoners are unsuitable for programs. There is also variability at the prison-level in how these items are collected and coded.

Corrective Services NSW has improved the quality of its data collection over the past five years, and made progress to address the gaps in data for program evaluators, but advises that ensuring prisons staff are trained and have enough time to enter quality data on prisoners as needed is a challenge. Additional funding allocated in 2016 to improve the evaluation capability of Corrective Services NSW may address some of these gaps. This funding has been allocated to engage external experts to develop and implement an evaluation framework and complete evaluations. Corrective Services NSW has also allocated funding to improve its own evaluation unit to improve the quality of data collected.

Robust program datasets should be a continued priority for newly implemented and existing programs, so that Corrective Services NSW can show that it is achieving the intended outcomes from its investment in prisoner rehabilitation. Development of a detailed forward program of evaluations, in partnership with external evaluators that identifies and addresses specific data gaps would help to address this.

3.2 Program frameworks are clear, but monitoring delivery at the prison level could be improved

Monitoring of program integrity could be improved

For programs to be effective, they should be run as intended. Corrective Services NSW has a clear policy and guidance framework on how programs should be run. The policy provides for two tiers of guidance at the corporate and correctional centre level. At the corporate level, 93 Program Development Workshops were delivered in 2016 and service delivery staff were asked to complete an onsite audit for all custodial and community locations across New South Wales. The corporate programs team have also facilitated supervision, debriefs and live observations of program delivery.

At the correctional centre level, the policy specifies that program deliverers are to receive supervision from a Senior Program Officer. Senior Program Officers receive clinical supervision from senior psychologists. It is unclear to what extent this is occurring at the correctional centre level and whether governance processes are in place to ensure that this is occurring on a regular basis. Our 2016 performance audit, ‘Performance frameworks in custodial centre operations’, found that the effectiveness of Corrective Services’ performance management system was limited and that employees did not have performance agreements. At times, General Managers were also reluctant to implement remedial action where there was a risk of an industrial dispute.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Response from Department of Justice

Ms Margaret Crawford
Auditor-General
Audit Office of NSW
GPO Box 12
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Crawford

Performance Audit Report on “Therapeutic Programs in Prisons”

I refer to your letter of 12 April 2017 inviting a response to the Performance Audit Report on “Therapeutic Programs in Prisons”.

The Department of Justice acknowledges the findings of the Performance Audit and will give full consideration to the report’s four recommendations. The recommendations are constructive and align with our strategic objectives for reducing reoffending. The Department of Justice also has concerns over how data has been interpreted and reported, despite this being previously commented upon.

The Audit Office assertion that a large percentage of inmates are refused parole and held in custody past their earliest possible release date because of program non-completion is not accurate. In 2015/16 1194 inmates were released from custody to parole by the State Parole Authority and within this group 808 (68%) had an identified need. Of these, 599 (74%) participated in a relevant program and 531 (68%) completed a relevant program. Within a total of 252 (32%) inmates that were released after their earliest possible date, 226 (86%), participated in a program under supervision in the community.

The NSW Government has recognised the need for more resources to target reoffending and is providing $237 million over four years for a range of new initiatives. This will enable CSNSW to increase supports to inmates with identified needs, targeting higher risk offenders serving short sentences, and offenders that have engaged in acts of domestic violence. A new case management system to be rolled out in 2017 will also improve the quality of case planning addressing some shortcomings highlighted in the Report.

The Audit by design focussed on group work programs delivered within prisons and accordingly the report does not elaborate on other significant activities undertaken by Corrective Services NSW to rehabilitate offenders in prison and in the community.
Group work programs are however only one component of a comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing reoffending and making the community safer. In providing minimal reference to other aspects of our efforts, readers of this report may conclude in error that little is being done to support prisoners to lead law abiding lives on release from custody.

Some of the other elements of our strategy include employment programs, vocational training, adult basic education, case management, pre and post release preparation, health interventions and one on one counselling. These activities were not reported on in detail in the Audit.

Since 2013, when staff numbers and programs were realigned to better address the needs of offenders, the numbers of inmates participating in programs has been maintained. This is despite individual programs now being longer in duration. In the period between July 2013 and the present, the number of program sessions targeting the reintegration needs of inmates increased by 144%, the number of sessions aimed at minimising the harms of illicit drug use increased by 373% and there has been an increase in psychology services to offenders across custody and the community from 6068 to 15396 session (154%).

In 2015/16 offender services staff delivered over 165,000 occasions of service. Fourteen per cent of these related directly to program support, 17% supported family and community engagement, 14% focussed on finance and debt management, 8% related directly to addiction services. All of these have the potential to positively influence the success of reintegration after release.

Over 80% of eligible inmates in NSW prisons are engaged in work where they have the opportunity to gain employability skills. In 2015/16 there were 8,576 units of educational competency awarded to inmates focussing on literacy, language and numeracy. In addition to this 2,978 inmates participated in vocational training courses delivered by TAFE NSW. A new model of inmate education currently being implemented is expected to increase participation in education in accordance with learning needs.

In response to the Audit Report, the Department of Justice will collate details and comments previously provide to your office to ensure the public have a more detailed understanding of how risks are identified, how resources are targeted as well as the comprehensive steps undertaken to increase community safety. This will be published on our website at http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/

Yours sincerely

Brendan Thomas
Acting Secretary
Appendix 2: Response from the Audit Office

The Audit Office acknowledges the Department of Justice’s response to this report that a majority of people granted parole by the State Parole Authority have participated or completed a relevant prison program.

The Audit Office report highlights that a majority of prisoners who were refused parole by the State Parole Authority in 2015 had program non-completion identified as a contributing reason for parole refusal (p3 and 14). This is also consistent with findings made by the Inspector of Custodial Services in a 2015 report (referenced at p6 of our report).
Appendix 3: About the audit

Audit objective
This audit assessed whether prison programs aimed at reducing reoffending are available, accessible and effective.

Audit scope and focus
The audit sought to answer the following questions:

1. Are relevant programs to address reoffending available?
2. Are programs accessible to prisoners?
3. Are programs effective in reducing reoffending behaviour?

Audit Exclusions
The audit will not seek to examine:

- question the merits of NSW Government policy objectives.
- vocational programs. The Inspector of Custodial Services will undertake a review of this in 2017. Given this, and that vocational programs are not often a requirement for parole, we have excluded them from scope.
- general, non-therapeutic behaviour management programs (for example, controlling privileges or out of cell time) aimed at encouraging prisoners to comply with direction in prison.
- post-release programs and follow-up.
- programs for juvenile offenders. This was audited previously in April 2016.

Audit Criteria
For audit question 1 we checked whether:

- all prisoners receive a timely assessment of their program needs.
- available programs address relevant prisoner offending behaviours.
- the case management process effectively monitors prisoner progress and ensures program needs are met.

For audit question 2 we checked whether:

- offenders complete programs before their earliest possible release date.
- prison processes and facilities support prisoners attending programs.
- accountability frameworks at the local level ensure that participation in programs is prioritised.

For audit question 3 we checked whether:

- programs are effective in reducing offender behaviour.
- Corrective Services NSW monitors program effectiveness with relevant performance indicators.
- programs are delivered in accordance with their guidelines and specifications.

Audit approach
We focused on a selection of programs targeted at prisoners who make up more than half of the prison population. The rate of reoffending for the offences targeted is also high - at 63 per cent for assaults, 42 per cent for sexual assaults and 63 per cent for drug offences:

- Violent Offender Program (VOTP) - is an intensive therapy program for men who have a history of violent behaviour. It is conducted in a separate unit within prison and targets high risk and high needs offenders.
• EQUIPS Aggression - is designed to increase participants’ ability to manage difficult life events and minimise aggressive behaviour. The program contains 5 modules and targets offenders who have a LSI-R of medium to high.

• Custody Based Intensive Program (CUBIT) - is an intensive therapy program for men who have sexually abused adults and/or children. The program targets offenders that have been assessed as high risk as per the Static-99.

• EQUIPS Addiction - is designed to address the addictive behaviour of medium to high risk offenders and to provide participants with a pathway to support services for addictive behaviours. The program contains 5 modules and targets offenders with a LSI-R of medium to high.

• EQUIPS Foundation (General offender program) - is a general 20-session therapeutic program available to all medium to high-risk offenders regardless of their offence type.

• EQUIPS Domestic Abuse - is based on a psycho-behavioural framework and has strong therapeutic influence in its delivery. The program places a strong emphasis on inviting perpetrators to accept responsibility for their offending behaviour.

• Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (IDATP) - is a six to eight-month high intensity group treatment program for offenders whose alcohol and other drug use have been identified to be directly linked to their offending behaviour.

Audit fieldwork
As part of this audit we visited the following correctional centres:

• Cessnock Correctional Centre
• Junee Correctional Centre
• Metropolitan Special Programs Centre
• Dillwynia Correctional Centre
• Outer Metropolitan Multi-Purpose Correctional Centre

Audit methodology
Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Audit Standards ASAE 3500 on performance auditing. The Standard requires the audit team to comply with relevant ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance and draw a conclusion on the audit objective. Our processes have also been designed to comply with the auditing requirements specified in the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983.

Acknowledgements
We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by Corrective Services New South Wales. In particular, we wish to thank our liaison officers and staff who participated in interviews and provided material relevant to the audit.

We would also like to thank other stakeholders that spoke to us and provided material during the audit.

Audit team
Phyllis Poon and Daksha Sridhar conducted the performance audit. Kathrina Lo and Claudia Migotto provided direction and quality assurance.

Audit cost
Including staff costs, travel and overheads, the estimated cost of the audit is $307,000.
Performance auditing

What are performance audits?
Performance audits determine whether an agency is carrying out its activities effectively, and doing so economically and efficiently and in compliance with all relevant laws.

The activities examined by a performance audit may include a government program, all or part of a government agency or consider particular issues which affect the whole public sector. They cannot question the merits of government policy objectives.

The Auditor-General’s mandate to undertake performance audits is set out in the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983.

Why do we conduct performance audits?
Performance audits provide independent assurance to parliament and the public.

Through their recommendations, performance audits seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government agencies so that the community receives value for money from government services.

Performance audits also focus on assisting accountability processes by holding managers to account for agency performance.

Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the Auditor-General who seeks input from parliamentarians, the public, agencies and Audit Office research.

What happens during the phases of a performance audit?
Performance audits have three key phases: planning, fieldwork and report writing. They can take up to nine months to complete, depending on the audit’s scope.

During the planning phase the audit team develops an understanding of agency activities and defines the objective and scope of the audit.

The planning phase also identifies the audit criteria. These are standards of performance against which the agency or program activities are assessed. Criteria may be based on best practice, government targets, benchmarks or published guidelines.

At the completion of fieldwork the audit team meets with agency management to discuss all significant matters arising out of the audit. Following this, a draft performance audit report is prepared.

The audit team then meets with agency management to check that facts presented in the draft report are accurate and that recommendations are practical and appropriate.

A final report is then provided to the CEO for comment. The relevant minister and the Treasurer are also provided with a copy of the final report. The report tabled in parliament includes a response from the CEO on the report’s conclusion and recommendations. In multiple agency performance audits there may be responses from more than one agency or from a nominated coordinating agency.

Do we check to see if recommendations have been implemented?
Following the tabling of the report in parliament, agencies are requested to advise the Audit Office on action taken, or proposed, against each of the report’s recommendations. It is usual for agency audit committees to monitor progress with the implementation of recommendations.

In addition, it is the practice of Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to conduct reviews or hold inquiries into matters raised in performance audit reports. The reviews and inquiries are usually held 12 months after the report is tabled. These reports are available on the parliamentary website.

Who audits the auditors?
Our performance audits are subject to internal and external quality reviews against relevant Australian and international standards.

Internal quality control review of each audit ensures compliance with Australian assurance standards. Periodic review by other Audit Offices tests our activities against best practice.

The PAC is also responsible for overseeing the performance of the Audit Office and conducts a review of our operations every four years. The review’s report is tabled in parliament and available on its website.

Who pays for performance audits?
No fee is charged for performance audits. Our performance audit services are funded by the NSW Parliament.

Further information and copies of reports
For further information, including copies of performance audit reports and a list of audits currently in progress, please see our website www.audit.nsw.gov.au or contact us on 9275 7100.
Our vision
Making a difference through audit excellence.

Our mission
To help parliament hold government accountable for its use of public resources.

Our values

Purpose – we have an impact, are accountable, and work as a team.

People – we trust and respect others and have a balanced approach to work.

Professionalism – we are recognised for our independence and integrity and the value we deliver.