Report on Pre and Post-Release Housing Services for Prisoners in NSW
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1. Introduction
Finding suitable accommodation is a fundamental concern to most in society. It is of particular concern to those with few economic resources who are competing in an increasingly difficult housing market to secure an affordable and appropriate place to live. In NSW, access to affordable housing is particularly difficult with 96,075 people on the NSW Department of Housing register (NSW DOH Annual Report 2000-2001:15). NSW Shelter estimates that there is a 12-year wait to secure DOH accommodation (report from site: http://www.sheltersw.infoxchange.net.au). Furthermore, recent estimates of homelessness suggest that there are over 35,000 homeless people in NSW seeking accommodation (from site: www.cityofsydney.gov.au). The current obstacles to securing housing become even more difficult for those about to be released and those recently released from prison. Problems of unemployment, few economic resources, discrimination and stigmatization, family breakdown, lack of informal and formal support, lack of education and literacy skills as well as problems of accessing information are some of the barriers which pre and post-release prisoners have to overcome to secure suitable housing.

The Issue: Prisoners and Housing
As at June 2001, NSW Department of Corrective Services (DCS) reported a prison population of 7,752, which was a rise of 6% from the previous year (Keliher in DCS, 2001:4). It follows that any rise in the prison population in turn leads to a rise in the number of people leaving prison and seeking accommodation. Keliher suggests that the DCS can assist prisoners’ successful return to the community and reduce re-offending by emphasising through-care as a primary goal of the department (in DCS: 2001:4). Clearly, any successful return to the community from prison should involve the return to suitable housing. However, from the issues of stable housing, employment and social connections that maintain a well established link to reducing recidivism (Ward, 2002:23), of these Keliher only identifies employment programs as a means of reducing re-offending (in DCS, 2001:4). In addition, the Department of Housing does not have any prisoner specific programs for addressing housing issues for ex-prisoners (Baldry, 2002:6a). If housing for pre and post-release prisoners is not adequately addressed by correctional authorities or government departments then who is to address it and how?

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to review recent literature in the area of housing for pre and post-release prisoners and to analyse the gaps in current NSW policy and practice. In doing so, it is hoped that this report will further inform community housing providers so that the housing needs of ex-prisoners are understood and considered as part of their policy and project development. The emphasis is on highlighting how affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental to prisoners’ reintegration into the community. In this way, the report contends that ex-prisoners are a high needs group for which community housing has an important role to play.

This paper will draw on literature both nationally and internationally with an emphasis on that which is found in Victoria. The emphasis on Victorian policy is for two reasons. Firstly, local conditions for policy affecting prisoners in Victoria are similar to those of NSW. Secondly, housing policy in particular for pre and post-release prisoners in Victoria appears to be further developed than that of NSW and, as such,
may offer a suitable model for NSW. Specifically, this paper will offer a comprehensive literature review that includes a summary of research findings on the issue of housing for pre and post-release prisoners, a review of other policy responses and a review of current NSW policy and practice relevant to the issue. Further, it will identify the shortcomings of current NSW policy and practice as part of a broad analysis of the issue. Although it is not in the scope of this paper to offer any comprehensive policy response to the issue it is hoped it will provide an overview from which to do so.

Relevant Terminology Used
Ward (2002: 3) suggests that both throughcare and aftercare are derived from the medical model and are used to describe the practice of supporting a prisoner from entry into prison to the community. More specifically, Baldry (2002:2a) offers the following definitions:

Throughcare: programs designed to provide continuous treatment/support and education for prisoners from entry into prison to their post-release surroundings.

Aftercare: Long-term community based treatment/support after release from prison or institutionalization.

2. Literature Review
The focus of the following review is on Australian literature as well as literature from the United Kingdom which is used as a means of broadening the analyses as conditions there appear to be similar to those in Australia. Moreover, as programs and policies related to prisoner aftercare and support services in the UK are more developed than in Australia, they may offer a means of analysing how different approaches have worked in practice. Further, as specific conditions exist for women ex-prisoners in particular (Lazarus, 1995, Baldry, 1997), an analysis of these has been included separately. Other groups of ex-prisoners have specific difficulties in finding accommodation also, such as Indigenous people (Ward, 2002:55) and those with mental illness (Baldry, 2002:17a). However, as relatively little that is related to housing needs seems to exist on each in the literature, they have not been discussed in this paper other than as part of the broader prison population.

In general terms, what has emerged in the literature is that finding suitable housing is a high priority for currently serving and post-release prisoners and is an issue often linked to recidivism. However, surprisingly little has been done in terms of exhaustive research. One extensive and current paper completed by Eileen Baldry (2002:3,4b) determined that literature in this field both nationally and internationally is characterized by: “a paucity of studies in general; a lack of work on the particular housing issues faced by high needs groups; few empirical studies featuring samples of sufficient size to be representative of the group as a whole; a lack of theoretical and statistically supported insight into the influence of factors such as housing on re-offending and social reintegration.” Further to this, Ward (2002:9) concluded that the data is descriptive rather than evaluative and is largely focused on US and UK programs.
2.1 Summary of Research Findings

Some common experiences amongst pre and post-release prisoners have emerged from the research both internationally and within Australia. Most highlight the difficulties which prisoners face upon release and the specific needs they have in relation to housing. In the UK for example, Carlisle found that less than half the ex-offenders who needed accommodation were able to obtain it (from site: www.jrf.org.uk). Moreover, she found that two-thirds of ex-prisoners who could not find suitable accommodation re-offended within one year of release whilst only a quarter of those with suitable accommodation did so (ibid). In short, ex-prisoners were more likely to re-offend if they did not find appropriate housing after release. Further research in the UK indicates that ‘ordinary housing’ in the community that includes various support services is the most effective way of addressing the housing requirements of ex-prisoners (from site: www.scotland.gov.uk). Indeed, according to Carlisle, most prisoners have a preference for independent housing after release (from site: www.jrf.org.uk). The emphasis there seems to be on dispersed community based houses and flats which house smaller numbers of ex-prisoners rather than hostel accommodation which not only increases the possibility of stigmatizing ex-prisoners within the community but may maintain a somewhat artificial environment quite apart from community networks.

Ward (2002:19) argues that the link between recidivism and appropriate housing is well established, drawing on findings by McCarthy and Hagan (1991) and Ramsay (1986). In short, the research suggests that suitable, post-release housing is crucial to a successful integration back into the community for ex-prisoners and is an important factor in limiting recidivism. Despite this, many obstacles remain for prisoners in finding appropriate housing that add to the already difficult transition back to the community. Although some in the wider community may experience similar difficulties, the specific circumstances in which prisoners find themselves upon release vary considerably to those in the community. Some of the difficulties which ex-prisoners face in finding housing are discussed below.

Difficulties Faced By Ex-prisoners in Finding Suitable Accommodation

The following has emerged in international/national research in the field. As Baldry (2002:4b) suggests, there are some ex-prisoners who are less likely than others to find suitable accommodation such as single women with children, those with mental illness and young unattached males serving short sentences. Although it appears that no comprehensive research has addressed all of these groups separately, some literature exists regarding the specific difficulties faced by women prisoners. Some of these have been listed below.

Women Ex-Prisoners

In the UK, fewer provisions than those for men have been developed for female pre and post-release prisoners (from site: www.scotland.gov.uk). Where they exist, female-specific hostels may not be appropriate since due to their scarcity they may be located a long way from a woman’s usual neighborhood making it difficult to maintain or re-establish valuable ties with family and friends (ibid). Where mixed hostels exist, they may be inappropriate for most if they accept sex-offenders or men who have histories
of domestic violence and if they do not, women often find themselves in a minority with their specific needs suffering as a result (ibid). In the UK, Carlisle’s study found that most women prisoners expressed a desire for ‘self-contained accommodation’ and were reluctant to stay in a hostel (from site: www.jrf.org.uk).

As Lazarus states, women are generally disadvantaged in society but those who spend time in prison face not only their gender role disadvantages but also the further hurdles of discrimination and systemic barriers (1997:17). As at June 2001, women represented 7% of the total prison population in NSW, 26% of which are Indigenous and 57% are under the age of 30 (NSW Corrective Services, 2001:21). According to Corrective Services, women are more likely to harm themselves whilst in custody with 39% of women prisoners having previously attempted suicide (ibid). Moreover, as with the UK, the lower numbers of women prisoners in Australia has meant there are fewer institutions which often leads to long distances between women and their support networks such as family and friends and fewer services within these institutions (Carlen in Lazarus, 1995: 6). Other factors influence women prisoners’ chances of securing appropriate accommodation after release. For example:

- Women do not have the same training opportunities or earning options that men do whilst in jail and it is more difficult to find well-paid employment once they have left prison (Lazarus, 1995:16).

- Women have a more difficult time getting or keeping community support networks whilst in jail as men have more custodial and community corrections options than women do (ibid: 16).

- A large percentage of women entering prison have the sole responsibility for and care of children (Hampton et al in Baldry, 1997:276).

- If children are in care, women find themselves in a catch-22 situation with attaining Support Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)\(^1\) housing as they can’t secure the housing until they have their children and they can’t have their children until they have suitable housing (ibid: 15).

- Women are hardest to find employment and accommodation for and are likely to require intensive support to develop social and living skills (Baldry, 1997:282).

- There may be nowhere to go but back to an abusive or drug addicted partner or the street (ibid).

Some recognition of the specific problems that women face in relation to accommodation appeared in the NSW Upper House Select Committee (2000) looking into the increase of the female prison population between 1995 and 1999. It recommended the wider use of bail and probation hostels such as transitional centres,

\(^1\) Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a support program which assists people who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless via both support and accommodation services. It serves as a response to those affected by domestic violence, whose personal safety is threatened who have particular needs including the need for immediate support (SAAP Annual Report, 2001:1).
rehabilitation facilities and residential programs and improved liaison between corrective and community services (from site: www.justiceaction.org.au). Moreover, it recommended that the Minister for Corrective Services “...ensure that all inmates and, particularly those with children, have adequate accommodation upon their release” (from site: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au).

Prisoners in General
Prisoners face the following problems in finding appropriate housing after release:

- The private rental market or ‘mainstream’ accommodation options are increasingly difficult for ex-prisoners to find (Carlisle, from site: www.jrf.org.uk).
- Arranging accommodation pre-release other than in hostels is particularly difficult (ibid).
- There is reluctance amongst prisoners to agree to hostel accommodation due to concerns of too much contact with other ex-offenders (ibid).
- Social isolation is a common experience for ex-prisoners who often end up either homeless, in unstable or unsuitable housing (Baldry, 2002:4b).
- A large number of prisoners being released do not have a suitable place to go to (ibid).
- Pre-release assistance in securing accommodation is inadequate (ibid).
- There is minimal coordination between government and non-government agencies regarding housing (ibid).
- Ex-prisoners/recidivists who are re-incarcerated consider unsuitable housing as major factor in their unsuccessful transition to life outside prison (ibid).
- There is a lack of variety in housing options available to ex-prisoners outside of hostels (ibid).

2.2 Review of Other Policy Responses

United Kingdom
As in Australia, UK housing policy for ex-prisoners can be viewed in terms of unmet need. Recognition of the need to address this state of affairs is apparent in the UK, where policy for the resettlement of ex-prisoners, aftercare services and sentence management has recently been accepted as a responsibility of correctional authorities (Ward, 2002:7). Central to this shift is the integration of custodial and community based parole functions in order to maintain some continuity of service (ibid). Broadly,
the focus is on services that address housing, employment and social isolation issues for ex-prisoners by developing a ‘community partnership’ approach drawing on local service providers (ibid:8). However, difficulties in realizing policy objectives still persist due to broad prison management procedures (ibid: 7). In general terms, there is a shift in policy away from funding hostel accommodation towards individual tenancies in ‘ordinary housing’, small-staffed units for groups of 2 or 3 people, ‘supported landlady schemes’ as well as maintaining some hostel places although on a lesser scale (from site: www.scotland.gov.uk). Currently proposed policy is that hostels should be for crisis accommodation and short-term assessment of the most appropriate housing options for ex-prisoners (ibid).

The types of accommodation options currently available in Scotland for ex-prisoners are: Hostels; Supported Tenancies; Group Tenancies; Core and Cluster and Supported ‘Landlady’ Scheme/Resident Caretakers (ibid). A brief description of each is offered below (all from site: www.scotland.gov.uk):

**Hostels**: The purpose of supervised hostels (staffed 24hrs) is twofold: to provide supervision of offenders and ensure that residents have access to support services.

**Supported Tenancies**: This type of accommodation is found for the ex-prisoner with support provided by a project worker to develop general living skills. Support is withdrawn over a period of time as the need for it reduces.

**Group Tenancies**: Two or more people may share accommodation with the same support as above.

**Core and Cluster**: A hostel which supplies support is at the core with a number of smaller units located nearby allowing a gradual move to independence. Ex-prisoners are assessed at the hostel according to need and moved onto the units as the need for support declines.

**Victoria**

In Australia, there is no evidence of a systematic, planned approach to transitional support services such as housing (Ward 2002:8). Instead, Ward states that specific initiatives are formulated and implemented locally without any cohesion or broader framework (ibid). This was highlighted in the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) Outcomes Paper on Representatives of Prison Providers and Sentence Management, 2001* which noted that there was no procedure for most prisoners who are released to freedom other than for parolees (Baldry, 2002:8a). That is, no one in the correctional system is responsible for assisting prisoners with their housing (ibid). Further, most generic housing/accommodation services are funded though SAAP which according to Baldry may house ex-prisoners, but to what extent is not known (Baldry, 2002:7b).

The *VHS Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre and Post-Release Services* (2001:1) highlighted that the lack of cohesion and coordination in current policies in Victoria has led to the following:
• Difficulty in retaining accommodation for prisoners on short sentences due to there being no formal entry for community agencies into prison and no identification of the prisoners' housing situation upon reception.

• Ex-prisoners finding themselves in a housing crisis due to the lack of certainty around a person's release date, a failure to arrange accommodation prior to release and immediate problems of travelling from prison to housing/support services after release.

• An extreme difficulty in accessing public housing, transitional/emergency housing or private rental housing (other reasons for this include limited public housing stock, waiting lists and lack of prisoners financial resources);

• A failure to address the multiple support service needs of ex-prisoners.

Some current Victorian Policies/Programs applicable to pre and post-release prisoners include:

• Support for Women Exiting Prison (SWEP): a Melbourne Citymission program which enables women released from prison to stabilise their accommodation, reunify with their children and families and resettle into the community. Melbourne Citymission funds it through trust funds (from site: www.mcm.org.au).

• Bridging the Gap (BTG): is a pilot funded by the Department of Justice and run by Melbourne Citymission to provide pre and post-release services to people exiting prison who identify as having a drug/alcohol problem and are at high risk of homelessness, post release mortality or re-offending (from site: www.mcm.org.au)

• Community Integration Program (CIP): is a pre-release preparation program for prisoners who are about to be released.

• Transitional Housing Management Program (THM): 19 community-based agencies provide housing and housing assistance to households in crisis as a result of homelessness or impending homelessness. It is coordinated with SAAP as part of an integrated approach to resolving housing and support needs of households in housing crisis (not just those exiting prisons). The types of assistance THM provides these households includes: information and referral; transitional housing (medium term 3-12 months); crisis housing (up to three months); housing establishment fund (financial assistance to households in crisis); special housing needs assessments (assessment of eligibility for early housing allocation in public housing) (from site: www.vic.gov.au).

Addressing the Gaps in Current Victorian Policy
Ward (2002: 51,52,53) proposes three initiatives to address the lack of pre-release preparation and coordination of housing issues for prisoners:
Pre Release Preparation - Information Kit: the aim is “to provide a minimum information and support package to all prisoners prior to discharge.” It would “include information regarding income support, accommodation, employment, social isolation and substance abuse support services; copies of key application forms and tailored instructions.”

Bridging Support - Housing: the aim is “to provide specialist housing advice, support and brokerage service to prisoners at entry and towards the end of their sentence.” It would “include crisis intervention early in the sentence to maintain current housing, negotiate reduced public housing rent and/or organize storage of possessions.”

Temporary Leave - Reintegration Program: the aim is “to provide prisoners serving shorter sentences with the option of completing a community based re-entry program for the last few weeks of their sentence.” Participants in the programs would “live in accommodation attached to the program, community based housing and/or their own accommodation.”

A Recent Victorian Policy Initiative: The Transitional Housing Management/Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative

The Transitional Housing Management/Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative (implemented by the Office of Housing and the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner) is a policy response to the lack of cohesion and coordination in current Victorian policy. Broadly, the Initiative will link transitional housing as well as support services to those who have been sentenced who would be at risk of homelessness upon release (THM-Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative Project Outline, 2002:2). It will do this by working to maintain accommodation for those entering prison with existing accommodation that are on short-term sentences and target those leaving prison from longer-term sentences that are at risk of homelessness (ibid:3).

The THM program is a community housing response to clients with a variety of support needs. Community housing providers manage the THM properties whilst support agencies provide the necessary support to the clients. The Office of Housing (OOH) will supply transitional housing properties for the Initiative over a two year period as well as funding for ‘Housing Placement Workers’ who will work with the three prisons where the pilot will operate (ibid:2). It has provided funds to secure 61 properties within the THM program that will be a mix of leased and purchased properties according to availability and price (ibid:9). They will include two and three bedroom houses, flats or units that will house one program participant and her or his dependants (ibid:9).

The Initiative recognises the importance of addressing housing issues for prisoners early in the sentence. This will be done by the deployment of ‘Housing Placement Workers’ whose tasks will be to assess prisoners housing circumstances and risks of homelessness as well as identifying the support needs of each and assist them in securing appropriate accommodation prior to release (ibid: 3). For shorter term prisoners the Housing Placement Worker (HPW) may need to act immediately after the prisoners’ reception into prison in order to maintain current housing. For longer-
term prisoners it may be necessary to formulate a ‘pre-release housing plan’ with the prisoner (ibid:7,8). The HPW will also identify the various support needs of clients and if necessary link them with the appropriate services in order to address homelessness and issues associated with reintegration and returning to the community after prison (ibid:10). The goal is to secure longer-term housing results that prevent a return to homelessness (ibid).

This initiative indicates that Victorian policy for the housing of ex-prisoners is further advanced than that of NSW and may serve as a model for NSW project development. It addresses the lack of coordination and cohesion in current policy by drawing together correctional authorities, support services and transitional housing agencies. It recognizes the importance of addressing housing issues for prisoners prior to release and emphasizes that prisoners’ re-integration into the community must involve pre-release preparation and planning. Deakin University will evaluate the implementation and impact of the project.

2.3 Review of Current NSW Policy and Practices

Programs and policies for the housing of ex-prisoners in NSW lack any cohesion or broader framework (Ward, 2002:8). Along with correctional authorities, public housing has failed to address housing issues for prisoners in any cohesive manner. The following are of some of the current NSW Policies/Programs and services applicable to pre and post-release prisoners.

- **CRC Justice Support**: CRC provide assistance in finding accommodation for ex-prisoners through: the ‘Women’s Housing Advocate’; the ‘Men’s Housing Project’ and the ‘Community Accommodation Worker’ (from site: [www.crjs.org.au](http://www.crjs.org.au)). They provide a total of 24 beds for male ex-offenders and 8 for female ex-offenders. The Women’s Housing Advocate meets clients in prison to assess their housing needs and speaks to those who have contacted CRC directly (ibid). The ‘Men’s Housing Project’ offers supported accommodation for male ex-prisoners with priority given to those at risk of homelessness (ibid). Applications are assessed individually often through referrals made via a welfare or parole officer (ibid). The ‘Community Accommodation Worker’ assists clients to find accommodation in the community via referrals made from prison by Welfare, Probation or Parole Departments and assists those who call CRC directly (ibid). This may be done through information such as lists of cheap private rental, hostels or benefits available or through more long term assistance with applications to Department of Housing and community housing providers (ibid). The Department of Community Services through SAAP funds CRC Accommodation Service. CRC also receives funding through the Department of Corrective Services’ Community Grants Program. CRC are involved in joint ventures with Resamen, SWISH and St George Community Housing Co-op all of which are funded through the Office of Community Housing (Irvine, M in CRC Annual Report 2001:7).
Life After Prison (LAP): LAP is run by Anglicare and works with prisoners in gaol, the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners. Although it no longer directly provides accommodation, it includes residential programs for men and women who have no family by referring them to agencies and individuals as well as offering a range of support services. The emphasis of LAP is client case management by connecting the Anglican Church to the client and their family both pre and post-release. This process starts inside prison with the prison chaplain who refers the client to LAP for assessment. If the decision is made by LAP to proceed with the client, an assessment of the client's needs for support services and accommodation follows and a client specific program is devised. LAP is partly funded by the Department of Corrective Services through the Community Grants Program (pers comm).

Breakout Housing: run by a committee of ex-prisoners for prisoners and their families for around 20 people. It receives no funding but is run from a Department of Housing owned building (pers comm).

St. George Community Housing Co-op: focus is on assisting people who require support to access and maintain permanent housing that meets their needs. St. George Community Housing houses a diverse range of tenants that includes those with special support needs such as ex-offenders (known ex-offenders make up 4% of tenants with support needs). Along with accommodation, it has arrangements with 21 different support service agencies. Housing stocks are either acquired by St. George Community Housing from the private market, capital properties transferred from the Department of Housing or head-leasing from private landlords. It receives recurrent funding under the Community Housing Leasing Program (CHLP) and is funded by the Office of Community Housing (OCH), Department of Housing (DOH) and the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care. Additional funding is through SAAP (St. George Community Housing Co Op Annual Report, 2001).

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP): Is a State/Commonwealth government initiative that provides support for homeless people and those considered at risk of homelessness. NSW SAAP does not have prisoner specific programs but prisoners fall into some of the targeted at-risk categories such as mental illness, intellectual disability, Indigenous people, family breakdown, financial difficulty and domestic violence survivors (Baldry, 2002:5a).

NSW Department of Corrective Services: the Department of Corrective Services through its Community Grants Program funds some community agencies that provide housing for ex-prisoners. These include Glebe House, Rainbow Lodge, Guthrie House and CRC Justice Support (Department of Corrective Services, 14:2001).

NSW Department of Housing: Public housing has no special programs for ex-prisoners but as with SAAP many meet all the criteria (Baldry,
2002:6a). Public housing policy relevant to prisoners includes (Baldry, 2002:6a): the provision for tenants to be absent for 3 months; the provision for a tenancy to be transferred to other household members if eligible; the relinquishment of tenancy; the provision to reapply for housing while in prison; the provision for consideration for priority housing if public housing was relinquished while in prison.

- Rentstart (DOH): This is a Department of Housing assistance service for low-income earners or social security recipients. It includes (from site: www.housing.nsw.gov.au):
  - 'Rentstart Standard' which provides 75% of bond for housing or key money/security deposit for caravan parks, boarding houses or hotels;
  - 'Rentstart Plus' which provides standard assistance plus two weeks advance rent and in special circumstances up to 100% of bond assistance. Eligibility relevant to ex-prisoners includes: homelessness or impending homelessness; fleeing domestic violence; residing in a refuge; persons subject to violence harassment or abuse and persons recently released from jail.

- FACS/Centrelink: post-release, prisoners (over 21 to pension age) can apply for Newstart allowance and receive one week’s benefit in advance and apply for a one-week crisis payment which is then deducted from the following fortnightly payment (Baldry, 2002:7a).

3. Gaps in NSW Current Policy and Practice
Despite what the literature indicates regarding the difficulties faced by pre and post-release prisoners in finding suitable accommodation and despite the importance of appropriate housing in integrating ex-prisoners back into the community, many gaps remain in current NSW policy and practice in accommodating the housing needs of ex-prisoners. Although there are service provisions that include housing for ex-prisoners in NSW, the lack of a comprehensive policy framework within which these programs can operate makes it difficult for prisoners to access housing services. The need for a framework encompassing public and community housing as well as correctional authorities is clear. Baldry suggests there is a need for targeted programs for particular high needs groups as well as a wider variety of options for the different needs of the prison population (2002:16a). In addition, Baldry identifies the following gaps in current NSW policy and practice: a lack of pre-release information on housing options; a lack of coordination between government and non-government organizations regarding housing for ex-prisoners; a lack of programs to keep homeless people out of prison (ibid).

A Model for NSW?
The THM-Corrections Pathways Initiative pilot may provide NSW with a model that can address many of the gaps in current NSW policy and practice. It offers correctional authorities as well as government and community organizations an opportunity to pursue a coordinated policy response in an integrated approach to housing for ex-prisoners. Both the evaluation and reviews of the project should be
seen in NSW as an opportunity to view how the project addresses the issue of housing for ex-prisoners and how it might inform a much-needed NSW project.

Community Housing in NSW
In the absence of a comprehensive response to housing for ex-prisoners in NSW there are ways in which community housing providers may address the particular housing needs of ex-prisoners at a more localised level. Currently, there appears to be a lack of prisoner specific projects in this sector. Although there are community housing projects for ex-prisoners such as those offered by St. George Community Housing, Resamen and SWISH, out of seven other community housing providers contacted that have prisons located in the local area, only one reported having any prisoner specific projects. Furthermore, only one of these had a policy of sending information about their housing services to the local prisons unless it was specifically requested. There may be a variety of reasons for this including a lack of availability of housing, however given the importance of housing to ex-prisoners, an understanding of what housing options are available to them may assist them in securing suitable housing in the future.

Although it is not in the scope of this report to develop a policy response, the following may provide options for consideration by community housing providers that could be introduced at a local level. Of course, the starting point is an awareness of the particular housing needs of ex-prisoners and it is hoped that this paper has gone some of the way towards doing this. Other options for consideration include:

- recognising ex-prisoners as a high needs group and assessing them accordingly in the allocation process;
- including a question on the housing application form about whether the applicant is a recently released prisoner (the common Housing Association Application Form currently being developed includes one such question);
- introducing a policy of regularly sending information to local prisons about housing services provided (the common Housing Association Application Form may provide a standardised means of doing this);
- identifying the support needs of ex-prisoners and developing support agreements with service providers accordingly (some community housing providers may have support agreements and experience in this area which they can draw upon).

Conclusion
In summary, the literature indicates that housing policy and programs for prisoners in NSW are currently underdeveloped and lack any coordination or cohesion. Moreover, the importance of finding suitable housing to a prisoner’s successful return to the community is clearly evident in the literature and highlights the link between inappropriate housing and recidivism. However, models exist both in the UK and Victoria that could be used to inform policy and program development in NSW. Specifically, the THM-Correction Pathways Initiative Pilot in Victoria may serve as a model that could address the current gaps in NSW policy and practice. Indeed,
community housing in NSW is well placed to pursue partnerships with government, support agencies and correctional authorities to address these gaps.

Finally, as prisoners face a range of difficulties upon release, surely appropriate housing is the starting point for readjusting to life outside of prison. In this regard, this paper contends that ex-prisoners are a high needs group requiring specific policy and programs to effectively address their disadvantage. Housing is fundamental to all in society, particularly those with complex and pressing needs and at risk of homelessness such as recently released prisoners. It is certainly time that these needs be appropriately addressed in NSW through a comprehensive, coordinated and planned policy response.
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