

Appendices

Appendix 1: Response from Department of Justice



Office of the Secretary
Justice Precinct Offices
Locked Bag 5111
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124
Tel 02 8688 7777 | Fax 02 8688 7960
www.justice.nsw.gov.au

Your ref: PA6588
Our ref: D17/270439

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 (66%) completed a relevant program. Within a total of 262 (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

27/4/19