



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR  
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Report Name: ***Recidivism rates and the impact of treatment programs.***

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Tackling the rate at which ex-prisoners commit further crime is a community and financial necessity. Today, the Inspector of Custodial Services Neil Morgan has released a report into recidivism rates in Western Australia and the impact of treatment programs intended to reduce the risk of people returning to prison.

On releasing his report Mr Morgan said:

Too many prisoners are committing crimes after they are released. Over the past decade, 40 to 45 per cent have returned to prison within two years. This generates massive costs to public safety and the public purse.

Reducing recidivism has been a general goal of the Department of Corrective Service for many years, but I applaud the sharper focus that is now being given to this by the Minister and the Department and the fact that new initiatives and funding are being directed this way.

Mr Morgan specifically welcomed the Department's recently-developed target of achieving a six per cent reduction in recidivism each year and noted the success of New Zealand Corrections in reducing recidivism:

If you mention reducing recidivism to some people, they look at you as if you are a naïve fool. But New Zealand has done it and there is no reason WA can't also do it. New Zealand has set clear targets for reducing recidivism by 25 per cent from 2012 to 2017. Two years into the five year plan, New Zealand Corrections is reported to have reduced recidivism by 11 per cent.

Similar results can be achieved in WA but this will depend on having a sharp understanding of what works and backing this up with intelligent planning, innovation, efficiency and community engagement. By evaluating the state's current recidivism rates and identifying areas for improvement, this report aims to play its part in improving outcomes and effectively targeting resources.

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The report acknowledges that many of the factors that impact on the risk of re-offending are beyond the Department's control, but also identifies areas for improvement. Mr Morgan said:

One of the most significant findings in this report is that prisons which struggle to provide services, programs and opportunities to prisoners have higher recidivism rates than better-functioning prisons.

This finding is not surprising but it does have significant implications: it would be a false economy to drive financial savings at prisons at the cost of proactive and innovative strategies to reduce recidivism.

The report found that the three factors most strongly linked to recidivism were age, prior prison admissions, and problematic substance use. The report also found that males, prisoners with low educational attainment, and Aboriginal prisoners, were more likely to reoffend. Mr Morgan said:

If crime is to be reduced, there must be adequate investment in programs, education and assistance on release for all these high risk groups, especially young people. Too many young men and women currently pass their time in prison in mindless and unconstructive ways. And although the Wandoo Re-integration Facility has been established for low risk young men, it is not full. In part this is because the Department has not yet directed sufficient energy into strategies and programs to engage this cohort at its mainstream prisons. Fortunately, it is now giving this issue higher priority.

The report noted that one area that has seen significant investment, with the explicit aim of reducing the risk of re-offending, was the provision of psychologically-based 'offender treatment programs'. International evidence is that treatment programs are only effective if the right program is provided to the right person. The report concluded that the Department had made substantial progress in targeting programs but that some gaps remained. Mr Morgan said:

Too few programs are available for women prisoners and for people held in the Aboriginal-dominated prisons of Broome, Roebourne, Greenough and Eastern Goldfields. Also, the Department does not have any robust evaluations which can explain what programs work for whom, and why, in Western Australia.

The report is available on the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services website:  
<http://www.oics.wa.gov.au/publications/review/>.

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