

Questions on Notice

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Mr Ryan Phillips
Committee member:	Mr Danny O'Brien
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Relevant text:

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, that did not answer the question about why the corrective services recidivism rate would go up. But since you have raised it and you mentioned it in the presentation as well, isn't it a fact, though, that the change to the accounting measure basically says, 'Recidivism is now not recorded until the person concerned is sentenced' as opposed to the old measure of them being returned to custody? It would be positive, I would agree with you, if recidivism rates were actually falling, but isn't it simply a case of this reclassification and the huge backlog of court cases we have got making the figures look better for you in terms of recidivism?

....

Ms HUTCHINS: And I think the thing to realise is that we have had a drop from 43.6 per cent down to 40.7, which represents the biggest drop in recidivism rates in 34 years, so it is pretty significant.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, that is what I wanted to ask. If the former reporting standards had been applied, what would the current recidivism rate be?

Mr PHILLIPS: We were unable to specifically assess the exact number. We can take it on notice, but in the time available we were unable to specifically determine that. But based on the analysis we undertook, we were comfortable that it was within the target.

Answer:

The expected result for 2021-22 for the rate of return to prison is 37.7%, down from 43.6% in 2020/21. This number would have fallen even without the methodological change.

Had this change not been implemented, the expected result would have been 40.7%, representing the largest drop in recidivism in 34 years.

The methodology change occurred following national agreement of appropriate counting rules, to improve comparability of reported recidivism figures across states and territories.

This change brings Victoria into line with the way other states – such as New South Wales – calculate their rate of return to prison, based on the new agreement.

The rate of return to corrective services within two years of discharge from a community corrections order decreased from 17.1 per cent in 2019-20 to 13.1 per cent in 2020-21, with an expected outcome for 2021-22 of 10.5 per cent.

Further detailed analysis will be undertaken to assess the impact of the methodology change on current and historical results at the end of the financial year, in preparation for publication in the annual Report on Government Services.

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Rebecca Falkingham
Committee member:	Mr Sam Hibbins
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Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. Okay. Do you have any modelling on the projections for men's and women's prisoner numbers over the forward estimates?

Ms HUTCHINS: Sorry, for women's, did you say?

Mr HIBBINS: Men's and women's.

Ms HUTCHINS: Men's and women's.

Comm. STRONG: Modelling is done, but after having 10 years of stability in modelling and projections, the pandemic has meant, and the lockdown has meant, there is not a lot of—we need more time data points to be confident in that modelling. It is too soon coming out of lockdown.

Ms FALKINGHAM: We do track short-, medium- and long-term demand, but right now, given what COVID has done right across the system, it is far too early to know whether these trends are going to continue. But I am happy to take on notice and get for you from the crime stats agency their current predictions in the short term.

Answer:

The Crime Statistics Agency advises that the most recently developed projections of criminal justice system demand incorporate historical data across the system to end of December 2021.

Given the unprecedented nature of COVID-19 related disruptions on the criminal justice system and continued uncertainty about levels and timing of system recovery and resumption of pre-COVID-19 crime trends, a high level of caution is recommended when interpreting and using these projections. Median projections for females and males held in adult prison custody to 30 June 2024 are provided below, based upon projections calculated in January 2022.

Date	Female prisoners – median projection	Male prisoners – median projection
30 June 2022	417	6,410
30 June 2023	526	7,006
30 June 2024	536	7,126

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Larissa Strong
Committee member:	Mr James Newbury
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Relevant text:

Mr NEWBURY: Minister, WAM is a wonderful organisation, and it was a commendable budget decision. Commissioner, I am interested in some data if you have it with you on things like—do you have the total number of emergency management days provided to inmates?

Comm. STRONG: We do not do the data collection every fortnight, so what I propose is—because I knew you would ask this; I think last time it was on notice—we wait until the end of the financial year, we wait until end 30 June, and then we can give you the financial year data for the 2021–22 financial year, which we would be able to give you in July.

Mr NEWBURY: So how will you break that down? Could you give—

Comm. STRONG: In a similar format as, I think, last time.

Answer:

At the June 2021 PAEC hearing, a question on notice was taken regarding the total number of EMDs granted during COVID-19. A response to this question was provided to the committee in July 2021, providing the number for the 2020-21 year.

Corrections Victoria will provide this data for the 2021-22 financial year in July 2022.

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Rebecca Falkingham
Committee member:	Mr James Newbury
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Relevant text:

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. Do you have any data on the number of prisoners that have been discharged early because of emergency management days—that is, the days were applied?

Comm. STRONG: From 1 July there was a change in practice, and now if you are on remand you are no longer granted emergency management days. You can accrue them for your time, but the decision and the decision process are not done until the point that you are sentenced. And that changed in July last year.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. So the only data you have is aggregate? I mean, clearly you have it by person, but you are not able to provide data any more specific than that—than the aggregate?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Mr Newbury, we are happy to take on notice what data we can provide you within the constraints of the security of the prison system. We have always consistently and transparently provided that emergency management data at the end of the financial year, but we are also happy to take on notice whether there is anything further. I understand the questions you are asking, so I will take on notice whether there is any further data without breaching any of our security arrangements.

Answer:

At the June 2021 PAEC hearing, a question on notice was taken regarding the total number of EMDs granted during COVID-19. Corrections Victoria will provide the same data for the 2021-22 financial year in July 2022.

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Larissa Strong
Committee member:	Mr James Newbury
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Relevant text:

Mr NEWBURY: Sure. Minister, if I can take you to page 104 of the PAEC questionnaire, there are 50 fewer community corrections practitioners. Why is that the case? The questionnaire, Minister, sorry.

Ms HUTCHINS: Oh, questionnaire.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes. There are 50 fewer community corrections practitioners.

Ms HUTCHINS: I might have to take that one on notice and get back to you.

Answer:

Funding for the Community Based Offender Supervision Output remains stable at \$290.9 million ensuring that the same number of community corrections practitioners are funded.

The projection in the questionnaire is an actual headcount and the change is due to natural attrition in a competitive workforce environment where the department is competing to recruit to similar position vacancies which exist across other sectors which is not unusual in a large social services delivery system.

The Department regularly recruits to vacant roles and continues to look at ways to attract and retain high quality Community Correctional Services staff.

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Natalie Hutchins
Committee member:	Mrs Bev McArthur
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Relevant text:

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Minister. According to pages 67 and 68 of the questionnaire, the per prisoner expenditure by the state on the Ravenhall and Port Phillip correctional facilities will increase by 10 per cent within three years. Can you please articulate what improvements Victorian taxpayers will see as a result of this increased spend?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Unfortunately you have run out of time.

Mrs McARTHUR: Perhaps you can take that on notice.

Answer:

The increase of approximately 10 per cent from the department's 2021–22 budget to the 2024–25 estimated forecast is largely attributable to inflation. The department uses an assumed compounding increase of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 2.5 per cent per annum when forecasting future contract expenditures.

These changes are in line with the contracts in place which were signed in 2014 for Ravenhall and 2015 for Port Phillip.

Portfolio:	Corrections
Witness:	Ms Natalie Hutchins
Committee member:	Mr Rod Barton
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Relevant text:

Mr BARTON: Thank you. Aboriginal wellbeing officers and the justice report recommendation 80—funding for Aboriginal wellbeing officers. Is it proportionate with the number of Aboriginal people in our prisons, given that Aboriginal women are the fastest growing cohort of incarcerated people?

Ms HUTCHINS: And you are asking—sorry, can I just get you to clarify. Is it why do we have so many, or do we not have enough?

Mr BARTON: No. Is it proportionate? Well, I guess I should say: have we got enough rather than—

Ms HUTCHINS: I am happy to take that on notice in terms of proportionate.

Answer:

There are currently 27 funded Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer roles across Victoria's correctional system. Every prison has at least one allocated Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer, and some locations have additional dedicated roles, based on demand and prison numbers.

In recognition of the need for more Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers, the 21/22 budget included \$2.5 million over two years to expand the number of positions and a new Aboriginal Staffing model. This investment allowed Corrections Victoria to increase from 18 Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer positions to the 27 that are currently funded today.

The Department has ensured that prison locations with larger numbers of Aboriginal men and women have additional dedicated AWO resources following this budget outcome. For example, there were previously two AWO roles dedicated to the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, and now there are three roles. On the 30 April 2022 there were 51 Aboriginal women in prison.

In addition to expanding the number of AWOs, the 21/22 budget outcome also enabled the introduction of four new Aboriginal Engagement Advisor roles. These roles not only provide cultural support to AWOs in prisons but also have an outward focus on building relationships in the community, which enables AWOs to focus more inward on supporting the needs of Aboriginal men and women at their locations.