

# Victorian Prison Drug Strategy 2002

## ADDRESSING DRUG ISSUES IN VICTORIA'S PRISONS

The new Victorian Prison Drug Strategy 2002 ("the Strategy") incorporates an over-arching set of objectives, principles and initiatives that seek to build on the successes of the previous strategy.

It introduces new initiatives based on current thinking, current community attitudes towards drugs, and best practice in prison drug management from around the world. The Strategy aims to establish an integrated and multi-layered approach to the complex challenges facing prison operators in addressing and managing drug issues in Victoria's prisons.

The Strategy does not condone or endorse drug use in prison. What it does do is acknowledge that there are a range of potential harms associated with drug activity in prison. Furthermore, the Strategy recognises more clearly the complexity of the issues facing prison operators in managing and supervising prisoners with drug and alcohol problems.

The Strategy's pragmatic approach acknowledges it is unlikely that all prisons or prisoners will be drug-free, and that new initiatives need to be established to maintain the good order of prisons, to manage prisoners effectively and to reduce health and safety risks.

### Mission

The Strategy's mission is to prevent drugs entering Victoria's prisons and to minimise the harm caused by drugs to prison staff, prisoners and society.

This will be accomplished by strengthening efforts to prevent drugs entering prisons, providing strategies to deter drug use in prison and by providing prisoners at risk of drug-related harm with opportunities to develop and maintain drug-free lifestyles in prison and upon release from custody.

### Goals of the Strategy

The new Strategy aims to develop a complementary and balanced approach between control and detection, and treatment and rehabilitation. This approach is directed at maintaining the good order of prisons and management of prisoners.

To achieve the mission underpinning the Strategy, the following four important goals (supply control, detection and deterrence, treatment, and health and safety) provide the platform to reduce the volume of drugs entering prisons, reduce drug-related harms, reduce drug-related re-offending, and improve the health and well-being of prison staff and prisoners.

### **Supply control goal**

Strengthening efforts to keep drugs out of Victoria's prisons.

### **Detection and deterrence goal**

Detecting and deterring drug use and drug trafficking within Victoria's prisons.

### **Treatment goal**

Providing effective treatment opportunities and harm reduction initiatives.

### **Health and safety goal**

Reducing health and safety risks to prison staff, prisoners, and society associated with prison drug activity.

## **Guiding Principles**

A number of guiding principles provide the foundation of and direction for the Strategy. These principles underpin the Strategy goals and mission. They are:

### **Harm minimisation**

Minimising the harm caused by drug abuse emphasises the need for strategies that reduce the supply of and demand for drugs, which work towards the provision of effective treatment options. This approach recognises that drug use cannot be completely eradicated, but that initiatives can be established that can act to reduce the harm caused by drug activity. Adopting this philosophy of 'harm minimisation' includes the following principles:

- The best way to prevent the harm caused by drugs is to stop them getting into prison in the first place. Effectively reducing the supply of drugs involves implementing strategies restricting the supply of drugs and alcohol, particularly by deterring prisoners and their visitors from bringing them into prisons.

- Reducing demand involves providing incentives for drug users to stop using drugs. This includes withdrawal assistance, the Identified Drug User Program, treatment options, and post-release support services. This principle acknowledges that a variety of strategies may be used to change patterns of drug abuse.
- Reducing the harm caused by drugs involves acknowledging that drugs, and the manner in which they are taken, have variable effects on users and encourages minimising the harm associated with drug use (such as violence, overdoses and blood-borne viruses). This approach aims to provide information on risks and to deliver options to reduce or eliminate these risks. This will be assisted through providing information on safe injecting techniques and the effects of alcohol and different drugs, and peer education programs.

### **Evidence-based practice**

The Strategy aims to continuously improve the management of drug activity in prison.

Evidence-based practice requires that initiatives undertaken as part of the new Strategy have demonstrated benefits in helping to achieve these stated goals and are effective in achieving performance objectives. These practices should be based on valid and scientific investigation relevant to the prison environment.

Continued research into, and evaluation of the practices and procedures that comprise the new Strategy, is critical to ensuring that current best practice innovations in the corrections field guide the implementation of future initiatives.

### **Social justice**

The principle of 'social justice' requires that the new Strategy is sensitive to, and respectful of, the diversity of needs among the prisoner population. This means that treatment will be made available to prisoners in accordance with their needs, wherever possible.

Research shows that some population groups have specific needs in respect to drug abuse issues. The needs therefore of disadvantaged or marginalised groups should be recognised and their circumstances accommodated to provide reasonable and equitable access to services and programs.

The Strategy identifies prisoners as an especially vulnerable population group in itself and seeks to develop initiatives that:

- recognise the uniqueness of this particular population group;
- are culturally responsive and effective;
- meet the social justice needs of prisoners; and
- promote greater understanding among prisoners about their use of drugs.

### **Effective prisoner management**

The principle of 'effective prisoner management' views the management of prisoners as an opportunity to intervene in problematic behaviours and promote law-abiding ways of living.

It encourages prison operators and service providers to determine on an individual basis the best way to help prisoners stop using drugs and to tailor the response to the specific needs of each prisoner.

It is important that the staff working with these prisoners are committed to achieving the best outcome for the prisoners involved. This can be achieved through a commitment among prison operators, management and prison staff to achieving the best outcomes for prisoners, even when this requires changing staff attitudes and values.

Effective prisoner management can be further enhanced through communication and co-operation between prison operators, service and treatment providers, and other corrections stakeholders.

### **Therapeutic jurisprudence**

Therapeutic jurisprudence looks at how the law can be used to increase the psychological well-being of offenders and prisoners. It focuses on the experiences of offenders in the criminal justice system and applies theoretical perspectives to better understand and improve this experience.

The development of therapeutic jurisprudence within Victoria's criminal justice system is used for improving the offender's lifestyle and promoting beneficial outcomes. The model of drug courts, which the Victorian Government will trial during 2002, is one such example of this approach.

As part of the concept, a number of practices are considered beneficial for prisoners, particularly promoting an understanding of prison practices, responding appropriately to prisoners needs, and promoting autonomy by including prisoners in decision-making processes.

The approach taken by the prison system can either support or undermine the benefit of prison initiatives. Staff working in the prison system should consider the impact management and staff practices may be having on the lives and behaviour of prisoners with alcohol and drug-related problems.

### **System integrity**

The principle of 'system integrity' recognises the need to continually improve prisoner management through the delivery of relevant programs and the need to support and train prison staff on an ongoing basis.

As a way of improving strategic planning and service performance, system integrity involves benchmarking, continuous improvement and business excellence, competency-based training, quality assurance audits, outcome assurance, and service validation.