

Monitoring the Strategy

ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

It is important that the new Strategy continues to evolve to achieve continuous improvement of the management of drugs in Victoria's prisons, drive new policy development, and to ensure that new developments are evidence-based and best practice. This will be achieved through a comprehensive and planned approach to monitoring, research and evaluation of the Strategy's initiatives.

A comprehensive evaluation program will measure the quality and performance of the various elements of the Strategy. It will also determine if prisons are implementing the Strategy in accordance with its aims, procedures and measurable performance indicators.

As part of the monitoring process, the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner will collect and analyse information obtained from prison operators and service providers to determine the success of the Strategy.

Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner

The Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner will monitor the implementation of the Strategy against objective, observable and measurable performance indicators to determine the impact on:

- the prevalence of drug use in prison;
- shifting types and patterns of drug consumption in prisons;
- prison drug-health and drug-related incidents;
- effectiveness of barrier control and search activities;
- in-prison and post-release overdoses;
- uptake and retention of prison drug treatment;
- referrals to post-release services; and
- drug and alcohol-related re-offending.

The Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner will also oversee processes undertaken by the prison operators to fulfil the goals of the Strategy, particularly through:

- establishment of a Drug Strategy Reference Committee which will monitor, assess and report on the progress of the new Strategy;
- development of meaningful performance indicators to measure qualitative and quantitative aspects of the Strategy;

- forums for feedback from prison and service providers, prison staff and prisoners, which will also act as a support and quality assurance mechanism; and
- supporting research and evaluation activities through funds managed by the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner.

Research and Evaluation Activities

Resources will be dedicated to research and evaluation to enable continuous improvement of the management of drug use in prisons. These activities will be scientifically valid in their design, meet Department of Justice ethical guidelines and research standards, and be integrated with existing corrections research and evaluation activities.

Systematic research and evaluation activities will increase the extent to which the Strategy and treatment programs are based on evidence-based practice. Data will be obtained on some of the most important measures central to the issues of drug abuse, including:

- reducing or ceasing drug use;
- promoting harm minimisation and safe drug-taking for those who persist in drug use;
- shifting types and patterns of drug use in prisons;
- reducing or ceasing offending; and
- increasing functional coping skills.

The results of the evaluation activities will determine the effectiveness of drug programs used in the prison system and will translate into practical strategies and procedures that can be implemented by prisons.

Research results will be widely communicated to key stakeholders and will result in articles being published for scrutiny in peer review journals. Additional mechanisms to advise decision-makers, policy planners and clinicians will include the presentation of research findings at forums and conferences and the placement of material on the Department of Justice website.

In order to evaluate the success of prison-based policy, programs and activities in achieving the objectives of the Strategy, the following investigations and research will be undertaken:

- the Bridging the Gap Initiative is to be evaluated by the University of Melbourne's Department of Criminology to determine its effectiveness in providing intensive pre- and post-release support for offenders with significant drug abuse problems; and
- clinical audits will be conducted periodically at Bendigo Prison, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Fulham Correctional Centre. These will evaluate the influence of clinical factors on prisoners at each of these locations, and how these factors each contribute to the delivery of best practice therapeutic services in prisons.

Conclusion

The new and enhanced Victorian Prison Drug Strategy 2002 provides a framework that builds on the principles and practices developed in the original Strategy. It will enable prisons to better address the issue of prisoner drug activity and provide effective treatment options to reduce drug use and re-offending.

The new Strategy builds on traditional detection and deterrence measures, while also ensuring that Victoria's prisons play a crucial role in reducing the harm caused by drugs to the prison community and society.

The Strategy will guide service planning for each of Victoria's prisons and case planning for each prisoner with a history of drug use. It will ensure better targeting of resources to achieve the maximum positive effect.

The Strategy encourages an integrated and balanced approach to achieve the four primary goals of controlling supply, improving detection and deterrence, improving treatment and harm reduction.

Successful implementation of these goals will lead to a range of benefits for the prison system and for society as a whole by creating a safer environment for everyone living and working in Victoria's prisons and reducing drug use and re-offending post-release.

The maintenance of security and duty of care principles are priorities in Victoria's prisons. The Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner is confident the new Victorian Prison Drug Strategy and the revised Identified Drug User Program will lead to better management of identified drug users and drug activity across Victoria's prisons.