

**EVALUATION OF  
THE REDEVELOPMENT OF  
COMMUNITY CORRECTIONAL SERVICES  
IN VICTORIA**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

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## INTRODUCTION AND OVERALL CONCLUSION

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In 2001, the correctional system in Victoria received funding of \$334.5 million to undertake a major reform strategy. This reform, known as the Corrections Long Term Management Strategy (CLTMS), is designed to guide correctional policy and practice over the next decade. The need for reform arose from a continuing increase in the Victorian prison population and a subsequent need to manage growth in demand for prison beds by focusing on diversion and rehabilitation.

One of the most significant CLTMS initiatives was the four-year (2001-2005) Redevelopment of Community Correctional Services (CCS). The Redevelopment aimed to divert people from entering custody and prevent prisoners from returning to custody. A range of infrastructure and service enhancements were undertaken to strengthen the capacity of CCS to effectively manage offenders in the community.

CCS Redevelopment was a complex and multifaceted intervention with numerous projects and policies implemented simultaneously across both CCS and the prison system. This presented a number of challenges for implementation and for the evaluation, particularly in disentangling the contribution of individual strategies to outcomes and longer-term impacts.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

There was **strong stakeholder support** for the Redevelopment of CCS. Magistrates, the Adult Parole Board, senior managers, and CCO's considered that there was a need for reform and for improvements in offender management in the community.

CCS Redevelopment had an **impact on reducing prison bed numbers**. Other work had established that prison bed diversion targets were achieved. The evaluation generated empirical evidence that these bed savings could be attributed to Redevelopment initiatives.

CCS Redevelopment **delivered on major policy expectations** set out under CLTMS. These included the implementation of a new risk assessment tool, supporting the roll-out of the Cognitive Skills Program, recruiting and training new staff, including the employment of psychologists, revising breach and offender case management processes and streamlining management of fine default orders.

The evaluation identified a number of **challenges associated with the implementation** of CCS Redevelopment. These included external impediments such as the mandated introduction of a new information technology system - E\*Justice - and a protracted and difficult industrial relations process. Issues in implementation processes were also apparent, including governance and management of widespread, rapid change; maintaining staffing capacity, tensions between centralised and local program delivery and limitations in monitoring and evaluation of processes and outcomes.

The **sustainability** of CCS Redevelopment outcomes is threatened if CCS is not adequately resourced to deal with these ongoing challenges, particularly in the area of staffing capacity. Maintaining effective approaches to offender management requires a motivated, well-trained and stable workforce. CCS risks losing the confidence of sentencing and parole authorities if, over time, Magistrates, Judges and members of the Adult Parole Board observe a decline in the capacity of staff to manage offenders in the community. Demonstrating effectiveness through dissemination of evidence about offender outcomes is important in sustaining the confidence of key stakeholders and the broader community.

This summary report presents findings about:

- The design of CCS Redevelopment including its overall theory of change;
- The impact of CCS Redevelopment; and

- Challenges associated with the implementation of CCS Redevelopment.

The final part of this paper discusses implications from the evaluation for the future sustainability of Redevelopment outcomes.

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## ABOUT THE EVALUATION

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CIRCLE (the Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation) at RMIT University conducted the evaluation of CCS Redevelopment. The evaluation commenced in August 2004 and was completed in December 2005.

This summary report is based on a larger evaluation report of the implementation and impact of CCS Redevelopment. It is designed to provide a brief overview of the main findings detailed in that report.

Evaluation questions were developed in consultation with senior staff in Corrections Victoria and these questions guided data collection activities. A multi-method design was developed to answer the key evaluation questions and included:

- A review of policy documents, literature and existing secondary data on the Victorian correctional system;
- An econometric event study analysis;
- Analysis of average rates of change in prison receptions and community orders;
- Two day site visits to seven CCS locations across Victoria;
- Individual and group interviews with over 100 Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) and 30 head office and senior management staff;
- Interviews with 17 offenders;
- A focus group with six members of the Adult Parole Board; and
- Interviews with 11 magistrates.

These activities generated a very rich information base, which is detailed in the larger evaluation report.

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## DESIGN OF CCS REDEVELOPMENT

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### Background

The Arthur Andersen Review of CCS (2000) in Victoria portrayed a picture of an organisation that was facing challenges in maintaining viable services within the broader context of an increasing offender population with complex needs. The review identified the potential for a strengthened CCS to reduce reoffending and help contain the growth rate in the prison population.

A number of areas for improvement were specified in the Andersen report, including: the introduction of a new risk assessment tool; a new offender case management and breach management strategy; transitional programs for prisoners, evidence-based offender programs; changes to workforce structure, recruitment, training and retention; and service changes to minimise the burden of managing, low risk offenders undertaking fine default orders.

It was envisaged that the development of an evidence-based platform of offending behaviour programs and the provision of targeted pre and post-release support would strengthen the capacity of CCS to manage offenders, divert offenders from prison, and in the longer term would reduce recidivism. In total, \$42.3 million was allocated over four years (2001 to 2005) to CCS Redevelopment.

### Research Evidence

A broader influence on the design of CCS Redevelopment was a growing body of international research indicating that offender rehabilitation can be achieved when interventions are based on evidence about 'what works'. The principles of effective correctional intervention are summarised below<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>For more detail see Andrews & Bonta (1998); Birgden & McLachlan (2002); Gendreau (1996); and McGuire (2002).

- *Risk classification* – treatment services should be matched to the risk level of the offender. High risk cases should have access to intensive programs while low risk cases benefit most from minimal intervention.
- *Target criminogenic needs (dynamic risk factors)* – focus on dynamic risk factors that contribute directly to offending and can be changed through treatment (e.g. anti-social attitudes, drug dependency and criminal associations) rather than non-criminogenic needs or static risk factors (e.g. age, low self-esteem, and anxiety).
- *Responsivity* – match treatment style and mode to the personality and learning styles of individual offenders. Typically, programs should employ a collaborative approach and be sensitive to offender diversity.
- *Treatment modality* – base the intervention on a psychological theory of human behaviour that is skills and problem-solving oriented and draws upon cognitive-behavioural and social learning methods. Target a number of criminogenic needs (multi-modal) in an intensive manner.
- *Community-based services* – programs that are delivered in the community rather than residential settings are more effective because new skills learned can be immediately applied in real world situations. Institutional programs can also be effective if they emphasise supportive community reintegration.
- *Program integrity* – programs should be properly managed and delivered by trained personnel in accordance with stated aims and objectives. Effective programs should continually monitor implementation (process) and rigorously evaluate impacts (outcome).

Together, the Andersen Review, CLTMS policy expectations, and the ‘what works’ literature provided a strong conceptual framework for the implementation of CCS Redevelopment.

### Implementation

A CCS Redevelopment team was appointed by the then Office of Correctional Services Commissioner (OCSC) within the Department of Justice to support the transition from policy development to implementation. The OCSC and CLTMS Steering Committee provided oversight of implementation activities and outputs.

The first stages of CCS Redevelopment focused on increasing organisational capability through the recruitment and training of 100 additional CCOs, the appointment of 19 psychologists, the establishment of four new CCS locations and a separate Fine Default Office to centralise the handling of Fine Default Orders.

Several new programs and policies were introduced in addition to these staffing and infrastructure improvements. They included:

- The development of new staff positions, such as Court Advice Officers, Young Adult Offender Specialists, Throughcare officers, Indigenous CCOs, Program Coordinators, and Staff Development Managers;
- The development of demand forecasting capabilities (the CCS Business Models) to assist in resource allocation;
- A new breach management procedure;
- Roll-out of the Cognitive Skills program for offenders;
- Streamlining of reports to the Adult Parole Board;
- A reinforcement of the role and importance of the judiciary in the operation of CCS, which included, in particular, strengthening of Court Advice Services.

- The introduction of a new risk assessment tool – the Victorian Intervention Screening Assessment Tool (VISAT).

The introduction of a new case management strategy – the Offender Management Framework and guidance for practice provided through the development of the Offender Management Manual.

This list is not exhaustive, but does highlight the most frequently mentioned projects and achievements associated with CCS Redevelopment. It also indicates the considerable activity that was associated with Redevelopment

### Theory of Change

The design of CCS Redevelopment was summarised in a diagram – showing its theory of change. This made explicit the ways in which CCS Redevelopment was intended to work.

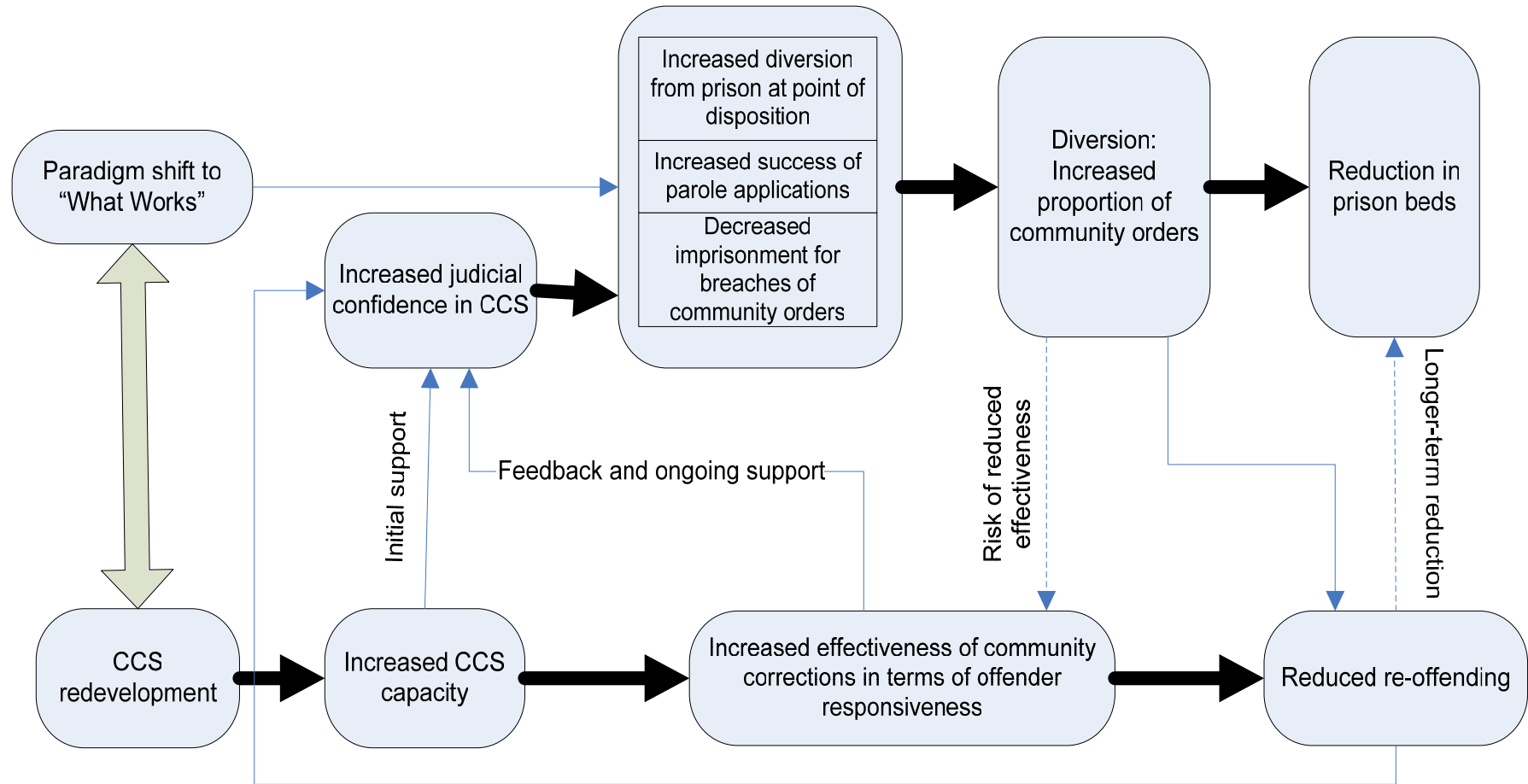
The CCS Redevelopment theory of change (see figure on page 5) focuses on the links between intended outcomes and the key mechanisms designed to achieve these. It also identifies the contextual factors likely to influence implementation and sustainability of outcomes.

This model was used to guide the evaluation and data collection activities. By understanding better how CCS Redevelopment outcomes were achieved, the evaluation could confirm that outcomes resulted from CCS Redevelopment rather than other sources and could identify risks to sustained achievement of these outcomes.

There are three key elements to the model. CCS Redevelopment was introduced into a **supportive policy environment**. In the past decade there has been growing awareness of the need to change offender sentencing and management practices in accordance with international evidence about what works. There was strong backing from government and key stakeholder groups about the importance of strengthening CCS so that it becomes a primary vehicle for diverting offenders from custody and enhancing offender rehabilitation. This widespread support helped ensure the likelihood of change being maintained.

The model identifies that a strengthened CCS can be achieved through improvements to **staffing capacity**. A key assumption is that increasing the number of staff and enhancing skills and knowledge in effective offender management leads to greater responsiveness of offenders to supervision, an increase in successful order completion (or decreased breaches) and a decrease in the nature and scale of reoffending.

The model also recognises that **confidence of sentencing and parole authorities** is a critical component in achieving prison bed diversion. A strengthened staffing capacity and improved CCS is expected to be visible to stakeholders and result in an increased likelihood that Magistrates and Judges will 'substitute' a custodial sentence for a community order. It is also anticipated that the Adult Parole Board might be more likely upon hearing about improvements in the capacity of CCS to release offenders eligible for parole. In effect this would lead to a greater number of medium to high-risk offenders in the CCS population.



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## THE IMPACT OF CCS REDEVELOPMENT

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### Measures of impact

The CLTMS established that a key measure of the success of CCS Redevelopment would be achieving a reduction of 350 prison beds over the four-year period of implementation. This was to be achieved through an increase of 1,000 offenders supervised by CCS. The intended longer-term outcome of the implementation of CCS Redevelopment was a reduction in reoffending.

Due to the timeframe of the evaluation it was not possible to assess the effect of CCS Redevelopment on rates of reoffending. This will be an important area of work for future assessments of the longer-term impact of CCS Redevelopment. A reduction in bed numbers, however, is an important indicator of a reduction in the number of offenders in prison and, in the short term, indicative of cost-savings and diversion of offenders from prison.

### Bed Savings

Corrections Victoria developed a formula for calculating bed savings that attempts to take into account the effects of net widening, the relative lengths of prison sentences and community based orders and the nature of different kinds of community-based orders. On the basis of this formula the CCS Redevelopment target for bed savings was achieved with 390 prison beds saved.

### Prisoner-Offender Ratio

Another way of measuring the prison bed diversion impact of CCS Redevelopment is to examine the average rates of change in the Prisoner-Offender Ratio (POR) and associated prisoner receptions and community orders. The POR is a useful summary statistic that expresses the relative relationship between custodial sentences and community-based orders.

The evaluators analysed changes in the POR during the implementation of CCS redevelopment. The statistical analyses were based on two data sets provided by Corrections Victoria. The first data set included all prison receptions and community orders and covered the period July 1998 to July 2004. The second data set excluded community orders associated with parole and covered the period January 2000 to July 2004. More extensive reports of these analyses are provided in the larger technical evaluation report.

There was strong empirical evidence that CCS Redevelopment resulted in changes in the relative numbers moving to community correctional services rather than to prison. The analyses suggested that this was not due to net-widening, but represented true diversion from prison. Key findings included:

- **Decreases in prison receptions**, across all offences in aggregate, and noticeable particularly for drug offences;
- **Increases in community orders**, across all offences in aggregate, and noticeable particularly for drug offences;
- **A degree of substitution** between prison receptions and community orders;
- **Declining average growth rates in the POR** over the period of CCS Redevelopment;
- **Increases in the flow of offenders into community-based orders** for two offence categories - possession and use of drugs and offences against property. This was noted particularly for offenders with a previous prison sentence, suggesting an absence of net-widening effects.

These findings constitute strong corroboration that, in overall terms, CCS Redevelopment accomplished its key objective of diverting people from entering prison.

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## IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

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This section describes issues associated with the implementation of CCS Redevelopment and is separated into two parts. The first part deals with external impediments that arose from the implementation context, while the second examines four specific challenges to the successful implementation of CCS Redevelopment.

### The Context of Implementation

CCS Redevelopment initiatives were introduced during a time of considerable change in the correctional system and the criminal justice system more generally.

As a 'downstream' component of the criminal justice system, operational demands on CCS are largely determined by the activities of other agencies in the system, such as police and courts. Changes in the policies and procedures of these 'upstream' agencies can significantly influence the nature and flow of work into CCS. For example, court diversion schemes such as CREDIT and the Bail Support programs influence the number of CCS order registrations.

Contextual issues at the organisational level also shaped CCS Redevelopment implementation processes. Two fundamental obstacles were emphasised during interviews with the senior management team. These included:

- The mandated introduction of a new information technology system - E\*Justice; and
- A prolonged and difficult industrial relations process

The evaluation team witnessed firsthand in site visits and through consultations with staff the significant and negative impact that extra administrative demands arising from E\*Justice were placing on staff.

Industrial issues relating to inadequate salaries and lack of career progression were also affecting staff morale and job satisfaction. Although these two external impediments were independent of CCS Redevelopment, they may have influenced attitudes towards CCS Redevelopment.

### Key Challenges

Along with these contextual impediments, four specific challenges to the successful implementation of CCS Redevelopment were identified:

- Organisational change management;
- Maintaining adequate staffing capacity;
- Tensions between centralised and local program delivery; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of program processes and outcomes.

**Organisational change management:** The complexity and scale of CCS Redevelopment presented a significant challenge for the implementation of the range of intersecting strategies. A number of new programs and initiatives, such as the risk-need assessment tool, the Offender Management Manual, clinical services and the Cognitive Skills Program, were implemented across both prisons and CCS. This sometimes led to uncertainty about budgetary control and overlaps in responsibilities for policy development and implementation.

Change management problems also appeared to be associated with significant alterations to organisational-governance arrangements during the period of CCS Redevelopment. For example, in July 2003 Corrections Victoria was introduced following a merger between the OCSC and CORE – The public correctional enterprise. The new arrangements sought to ‘streamline’ processes to ensure greater cohesion of service delivery, particularly between prisons and CCS.

Staff interviewed in CCS expressed concern about the way in which change had been managed. There was a perception that “too much change too quickly” had resulted in delayed implementation of some key initiatives, such as the risk-need assessment tool and the Offender Management Manual.

Government and Corrections Victoria budgetary processes were identified by the CCS Redevelopment implementation team as a barrier to effective change management. Budgets for various projects were not always clearly defined and there was overlap across different departments in the organisation. For example, prisons and CCS worked in parallel, but independently on the development of transitional services for offenders. This caused problems when both departments attempted to implement new policies at the same time. As one interviewee commented: “the left hand was not always talking to the right hand.”

Budgetary and financial imperatives also meant that offending behaviour programs and other related initiatives were often under pressure to become operational within a restrictive timeframe. As a result new programs were sometimes, by necessity, implemented prematurely without time to fully address barriers that may arise during roll-out to the field.

For example, the Cognitive Skills program required psychologists to coordinate assessment, referral and program delivery. However, due to time and resource constraints CCS locations were not always fully consulted and the role of psychologists was not adequately defined. This led to confusion and some initial resistance by staff to both the program and to the role of psychologists in the field.

**Maintaining adequate staffing capacity:**

There was a very strong view that high rates of staff turnover (estimated at approximately 37%) along with the underlying conditions that produce high turnover was the most critical factor influencing the implementation and sustainability of CCS Redevelopment, and ultimately the effective management of offenders in the community. Staff considered that without a stable, experienced and well-trained workforce it was not possible to continue to deliver quality community correctional services. A comment from a senior CCO in the box below exemplifies this perspective.

*A senior CCOs view on the importance of staff:*

“You can have all the programs in the world, you can have fantastic legislation, fantastic policies and procedures, but if you’ve got staff who are disillusioned, who are being paid badly, who are not trained and who are under so much pressure that they leave here then you’ve shot yourself in the foot.”

Instability and high turnover in staff can, among other things, lead to problems with continuity of care in the management of offenders and the loss of professional expertise in how to effectively supervise offenders.

Issues were also raised in relation to inconsistent and inadequate staff supervision and training across locations. Many CCOs, particularly those from metropolitan locations, expressed anxiety about “being thrown in the deep end” to manage high risk offenders before they were confident that they had the knowledge, skills and experience to do so.

Many staff in the field reported that they felt overburdened with their existing caseload and found it difficult to manage the demands of the administrative-process role with personal engagement with offenders during supervision sessions. This was exacerbated by the problems associated with the introduction of E\*Justice.

The senior management team at CCS was aware that a systemic problem in the area of staffing capacity existed but had difficulties in finding a solution due to a difficult industrial relations climate. Since the resolution of the industrial claim which resulted in changes to structure and pay, a Workforce Planning Project has been reactivated to address recruitment, retention and training of staff.

**Tensions between centralised and local program delivery:** Program integrity is a key principle of effective correctional treatment outlined in the 'what works' literature. However, there were some practical challenges with CCS Redevelopment in balancing this with program responsivity. In real world settings, highly structured offending behaviour programs are significantly influenced by a range of factors such as staff training and supervision, communication and co-ordination systems, program referral processes, and time and resources. The importance of the local context and program setting have only recently been investigated by correctional researchers and there is little guidance in the literature on how to effectively implement offending behaviour programs into complex organisational environments (Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Gendreau, Goggin & Smith, 1999).

Staff in several locations visited during the evaluation site visits provided a strong argument for the need to tailor some aspects of new offending behaviour programs to local circumstances and offender characteristics. They suggested, for example, that the benefits of requiring rural offenders to attend centralised metropolitan treatment programs needed to be considered against offender motivation to participate and possible risks to public safety.

Despite these difficulties, CCS was still able to successfully manage the complex task of rolling-out the Cognitive Skills program in a changing context and with considerable time and financial pressures. The experience should be used to assist planning and identification of implementation issues when considering the transferability of other offending behaviour programs.

**Monitoring and evaluation of program processes and outcomes:** Progress against the key outcomes of prison bed targets and new community orders registered was monitored on a monthly basis throughout the timeframe of the CCS Redevelopment project.

Several evaluations of new programs and projects were also completed. These included, a process evaluation of the Cognitive Skills program, an internal evaluation of the introduction of the Fine Default Unit and an external formative evaluation of the Home Detention pilot program established through CCS.

However, staff considered that there was still inadequate data available about the performance and impact of programs on offenders, particularly where treatment services are being provided by external agencies that might have different approaches to offender rehabilitation. Magistrates and members of the Adult Parole Board echoed these views about the lack of information of program effectiveness. These stakeholder groups expressed interest in understanding whether and how different offending behaviour programs worked to reduce reoffending.

Staff also suggested that existing CCS performance measures were limited because they were not adequately linked to offender outcomes. For example, the requirement to have an individual management plan prepared within the first six weeks of an order provides little information about whether the plan is meaningful to the offender and leads to behavioural change.

There was a strong commitment to evaluate programs and components of CCS among head office and senior managers within CCS. There was clearly a monitoring system for CCS Redevelopment in place and discrete evaluation of specific initiatives. However, utilisation of the outcomes of evaluation and dissemination of findings to key stakeholders seems to have occurred on an informal, ad hoc basis rather than in a co-ordinated fashion.

Overall, there is sufficient evidence to suggest a need for stronger emphasis on systematic monitoring and evaluation of CCS activities and programs. Unfortunately in relation to present data and information systems this might not be feasible. There are persisting complications with capturing and accurately measuring key performance indicators such as order details, offender demographics, breach rates, reoffending rates and offender participation in treatment programs. These problems are associated with inconsistent terminology and counting procedures stemming from the transition to the new E\*Justice data system.

Senior managers also expressed frustration that the CCS business models were not currently being used to monitor and evaluate service delivery activity. As a consequence the potential of the CCS business models to improve resource allocation and forecast demands on CCS services has not been fully realised.

The continued increase in the number of community-based orders evidenced over the period of CCS Redevelopment will place increasing pressure on the system. If staff are not supported to offer services, it is likely that service quality will suffer.

### **Stakeholder Confidence**

The second threat relates to maintaining stakeholder confidence in the capacity of CCS to manage offenders. Magistrates and members of the Adult Parole Board interviewed for the evaluation generally held a very favourable view of CCS, but sought more information about the performance of offenders on orders and the impact of orders on offending behaviour.

Over time gaps in service delivery may emerge and become apparent to key decision makers - Magistrates and members of the Adult Parole Board. This in turn might reduce their confidence in CCS to provide services that address the needs of offenders and protect the community. Sentencing decisions may therefore reflect these considerations.

CCS has an important responsibility to improve dissemination of information about the positive work of CCS in reducing reoffending and improving public safety. This can provide an important foundation to advocate for increased resources to match the expectations placed on CCOs to deliver effective case management.

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## **SUSTAINING CCS REDEVELOPMENT**

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There are two major threats to the sustainability of CCS Redevelopment outcomes.

### **Staffing Capacity**

The first threat concerns staffing capacity. General dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions are linked to high staff turnover and were considered by staff interviewed for this evaluation to be an ongoing impediment to sustaining improvements brought about by Redevelopment.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE EVALUATION

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