

Highlights of *Better Pathways*

The State Government has provided \$25.5 million to tackle the growth in Victoria's female prisoner population. This includes \$18.3 million for programs to support women prisoners and offenders and \$7.2 million for improvements to women's prison facilities.

There are 28 projects in the *Better Pathways* strategy which will be delivered by mid-2009. These projects will focus on diverting women from prison custody and breaking the cycle of women's re-offending.

Some of the most significant projects are:

- additional transitional housing for women on bail, including Indigenous women
- practical support for women offenders on community-based orders, including assistance with managing childcare responsibilities and accessing transport
- sexual assault counselling, advocacy and support services for women prisoners
- a Vietnamese liaison officer to assist the significant number of Vietnamese women in prison

- a new 20-bed flexible intensive support unit to accommodate and provide special care to women prisoners with mental health care needs
- upgrades to the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, including renovations to the prison's medical centre, visits centre and education and prison industries facilities
- a policy framework to guide the future delivery of women's correctional services
- improved training and employment opportunities for women offenders and prisoners
- a pilot program to assist women prisoners to manage and minimise debt
- extended post-release support for women exiting prison.

Better Pathways is a key initiative of *A Fairer Victoria*, the State Government's four-year \$788.2 million plan to address systemic disadvantage and improve the lives of all Victorians.

How can I find out more about *Better Pathways*?

Copies of the 40-page *Better Pathways* policy document can be downloaded from the Department of Justice website:
www.justice.vic.gov.au

Further information about the strategy can be obtained by emailing a request to Corrections Victoria: corrections@justice.vic.gov.au

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Phoenix Rising 2005 – Artwork courtesy Glynis



better pathways

an integrated response to women's
offending and re-offending

a four-year strategy to address the increase in women's
imprisonment in Victoria 2005-2009



Better Pathways will contribute to improved community safety by tackling the causes of women's offending and helping to break the cycle of women's re-offending.

The number of women in prison in Victoria has more than doubled over the last decade – at significant cost to the individual women, their children and other family members and the community.

The *Better Pathways* strategy has been developed to address this issue. It targets the needs of a group of women who have often experienced difficult lives, punctuated by episodes of sexual, physical or psychological abuse and problems with gambling, substance abuse or mental illness.

Tim Holding,
Minister for Corrections



Why has *Better Pathways* been developed?

The number of women in prison in Victoria has more than doubled over the last decade – the current female prisoner population is around 260 compared with just over 100 in mid-1995.

The cost of the increase in women's imprisonment is huge. There are social and economic costs not only for the women who are imprisoned, but also for their families – especially their children – and the Victorian public.

Victoria's two women's prisons – the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Deer Park and Tarrengower Prison in Maldon – are under unprecedented pressure because of the growth in female prisoner numbers.

Why has the number of women in prison in Victoria increased?

Victoria's increasing female prisoner population mirrors a worldwide trend. The increase can be attributed to several factors. These include women committing more serious or violent offences. This leads to more women serving longer sentences.

The increasing rate at which women are being remanded in prison custody has also had an impact, as has the number of women sentenced to short terms of imprisonment, including first-time offenders.

About one third of all women released from prison return to custody within two years.

What is the profile of women prisoners?

Women prisoners share a complex range of treatment and support needs linked to their offending, re-offending and subsequent imprisonment.

Many have issues with substance abuse or mental illness and have experienced sexual, physical and psychological abuse. They may also have poor physical health, limited support networks, low levels of education, high levels of unemployment and unstable accommodation. Many also experience financial difficulties as a result of problem gambling.

The majority of women in prison are also mothers with dependent children.

The *Better Pathways* approach

A specifically-designed approach is required to meet the unique needs, characteristics and life experiences of women who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The *Better Pathways* strategy will reduce:

- the number of women who offend
- the number of women going to prison
- the number of women who re-offend
- the level of women's victimisation.

How has *Better Pathways* been developed?

Better Pathways has been developed by Corrections Victoria in consultation with a range of government and non-government stakeholders. Government representatives have come from the departments of Justice, Human Services, Victorian Communities, Education and Training, Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury and Finance.

Non-government contributions to *Better Pathways* have come primarily from the Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee. This committee consists of 14 members who have a wide range of knowledge and experience relevant to women's corrections.

