

## Executive Summary

This paper proposes a framework for conceptualising and developing Victorian transitional support services. It is intended as a basis for consultation with service providers.

The paper is informed by a review of relevant international research regarding the impact of transitional support services. While the research base is rudimentary, there is solid evidence that transitional support services are effective in easing prisoners' experience of the transition from custody to community. There is also good evidence that these services can assist in delaying or preventing further offending when provided as part of an integrated, systematic response.

Analysis of sentenced prisoners discharged in Victoria reveals that most prisoners exit the system from rural/regional locations, most spend less than six months in custody and most are released unconditionally, without parole supervision.

The current Victorian transitional support service framework is extremely under-developed. There is no recognition that provision of transitional support is core function of correctional services; there is no statement of the purpose, objectives or desired outcomes of current activity; service standards are minimal and where they do exist, compliance is not routinely monitored. Exit planning and pre-release preparation activities are highly variable across the system and community based agencies have not been funded to provide meaningful levels of transitional support.

There is however, evidence of a renewed government commitment to transitional support services. This is reflected in recent decisions to fund the Bridging the Gap pilots and three transitional support units.

It is important that these initiatives are reinforced by formal acknowledgement of the correctional system's obligation to provide transitional support. This should be reflected in legislation, policy, operational standards and broader case management processes.

A cohesive service delivery framework is proposed as a means of structuring on-going consideration of the future of transitional support services. It comprises system objectives, principles and service elements.

Proposed service elements include pre-release preparation; temporary leave; release with residential supervision; release with community based supervision and a range of bridging support services. This last category comprises integrated case management, housing, employment and personal support services.

A range of service development priorities are also proposed. These include the design of a pre-release information kit as a universal platform for all other pre-release preparation initiatives; the development of a specialist prison-based housing program; the trial of a community based reintegration program for shorter-term prisoners; the redevelopment of the Community Integration Program as a targeted intervention to complement the pre-release kit and the redevelopment of elements of the current temporary leave program as a discrete transitional support mechanism.

Finally, it is noted that the ability to achieve good transitional outcomes for prisoners is impacted by a wide range of factors in the broader prison environment. These must be systematically addressed if an increased investment in transitional support services is to be fully realised.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

This paper proposes a framework for conceptualising and developing Victorian transitional support services. It is intended as a basis for consultation with correctional service providers and transitional support agencies.

The framework is informed by a review of available evidence regarding the impact of transitional support services.

Significantly, the framework does not attempt to distinguish the needs of particular prisoner sub-groups. While it is acknowledged that the optimum design of transitional support services will vary according to a range of prisoner characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity and offending history, this level of analysis is beyond the scope of the current exercise.

### 1.2 Terminology

A number of different terms are used to describe the transition from custody to community. *Community re-entry* is typically used in American program documentation while the terms *resettlement* and/or *reintegration* are common in British materials. Both terms have their critics. *Re-entry*, is thought to be confusing as it may be used to describe both a return to community and a return to custody, while *resettlement* and *reintegration* imply that the prisoner was settled and/or integrated in the community in the first instance, when this is often not the case.

The terms *through care* and *after care* have been borrowed from the medical model in recent times and applied to the process of supporting a prisoner from custody to community. However this terminology has a broader meaning within the case management literature and fails to reflect the supervisory and social control aspects that are often present following release from prison.

For the purposes of this paper, the phrase *transitional support* is used to incorporate interventions designed to facilitate a prisoner's successful return from custody to community. Note that this does not include parole, training/vocational or drug treatment services provided in custody, nor offence-specific interventions designed to reduce offending behaviour. While it is acknowledged that all prison interventions that aim to reduce the likelihood of re-offending may fulfil the technical definition of transitional support programs, analysis of the total rehabilitative endeavour is beyond the scope of the current paper.

The terms *pre-* and *post-release services* are also used here to describe particular interventions that occur immediately before and after the point of release.

### **1.3 Approach**

This paper draws on a range of program documentation, academic and professional literature regarding transitional support services. The material is primarily from the UK and USA as these nations dominate the discourse. It should be stressed that this paper is not intended as an exhaustive review of the relevant literature. A more selective approach has been used to identify broad program developments that may have relevance to the current Victorian situation.

The discussion is also informed by the comments of a range of Australian correctional practitioners. State government administrators from most Australian jurisdictions have been consulted to provide an overview of developments in transitional support services nationally, while Victorian pre- and post-release service providers have provided preliminary feedback regarding key findings. Contact has been maintained with the Australian Institute of Criminology to facilitate on-going exchange regarding new developments in the research arena.

## **2. Context**

### **2.1 Purpose of Transitional Support Services**

The existence of transitional support services reflects the reality that at some point virtually all prisoners will return to the community.

Transitional support can serve both regulatory and rehabilitative functions. It is the relative emphasis given to these functions that varies most over time and between jurisdictions.

A review of program documentation reveals a range of stated program objectives, most typically:

- To ease the prisoner's return to the community by gradually deescalating external controls.

This is often presented as an objective in its own right. It assumes that correctional authorities have a moral obligation or duty of care to facilitate the return of prisoners to the community on release.

- To prevent or delay the prisoner's return to custody.

This may be presented as both a cost containment and crime control strategy. It is also presented as a means of safeguarding the public by continuing to control the released prisoner under some form of supervision.

- To provide a safety valve that alleviates prison crowding.

While this is not always an explicitly stated objective, the need to reduce prison crowding has driven the vast majority of correctional program development over the past decade. Many transitional support initiatives are designed to enable accelerated release to community based services that free up prison beds for higher risk inmates.

There is on-going debate regarding the extent to which reduced recidivism should be a primary objective of transitional support services. Petersilia (1996) expresses a common view that recidivism objectives reflect political and funding imperatives, rather than realistic program expectations.

Logan (1993) frames this argument differently, asserting that correctional programs should not assume the goals and functions of other social institutions such as family, schools, housing, social security and welfare agencies. He contends that the historical tendency to adopt unrealistic program objectives has led to the wide gap between community expectations of the correctional system and what most administrators recognise as the system's actual capacity to control crime.

Logan advocates outcome measures that are narrow, achievable and measurable within the policies and programs operated by correctional services. Logan argues that prison programs should essentially aim to keep prisoners safe, healthy, active and free from further offences while under statutory supervision. This approach has recently been endorsed by the US Government Accounting Office as the basis of its performance audit function.

Its application to transitional support services is likely to produce an emphasis on the objective of easing prisoner return to community.

## **2.2 Background: Why a Focus Now?**

Both internationally and nationally, interest in the provision of transitional support services burgeoned in the early sixties and continued through until the end of the 1970s. Throughout the 1980s, transitional support services suffered from the suspicion directed at rehabilitation efforts generally as the 'nothing works' ethos led to more narrowly defined justice responses and away from holistic consideration of prisoner needs.

Transitional support services have been the focus of renewed international interest in the past few years. Four key factors appear to have contributed to this revival.

## Prison Crowding

Prison populations have increased dramatically across most industrial nations in the past decade. In the face of severe and persistent crowding, correctional administrators and legislators have been eager to explore a range of release mechanisms that reduce demand pressure by offering a form of accelerated return to community or by reducing the likelihood of a prisoner's subsequent incarceration.

## Increased Substance Abuse

The prevalence of substance abuse among the prison population has increased dramatically in the past decade. Drug treatment imperatives have provided new impetus for re-examining how prisoners return to the community. In many ways drug treatment programs are classic re-entry initiatives: they assume a fixed, or at least predictable release date, their programmatic content is explicitly linked to the conditions of re-entering the community and many programs include pre- and post-release support and supervision.

## Technological Advances

In the past decade there have been significant advances in the technology available to monitor the movements of released prisoners and test compliance with release conditions. A range of new remote electronic surveillance devices has prompted program designers to consider new service options that substitute reliance on costly prison capital with various forms of community based supervision.

## Parole Undermined

The role of the parole board as the traditional release manager has been significantly weakened in recent times, particularly in the US. Mandatory minima, sentencing guidelines, restrictions on remissions and other reforms have had the combined effect of limiting parole board discretion and reducing the number of prisoners eligible for parole. In the face of these developments, attention has turned to alternative ways of managing the return of prisoners to the community.

## **2.3 Recent Trends**

### United States

The dramatic increase in the US prison population in the last two decades has produced a corresponding increase in the volume of prisoners released to the community. While transitional support services were traditionally provided on an individual level, the present volume of releases has prompted a whole of community response.

This has translated into two emerging models: re-entry courts and re-entry partnerships (Travis, 1999). Re-entry courts seek to involve the authority of the court in the oversight

of returning prisoners. The court acts as the active case manager, marshalling treatment and support services as required. It also has the capacity to invoke sanctions and rewards. The court may support a range of attendant community accountability mechanisms such as victim councils and restitution boards.

The re-entry partnership model involves community corrections, police and 'neighbourhood' human service providers in a collaborative response to transitional support. Aside from service co-ordination at the individual level, it requires identification of the aggregate needs of returning prisoners at the community level. A range of grants programs are provided to address service development needs in the medium term. From a corrections perspective, the re-entry partnerships approach requires the gathering of prisoners from multiple facilities into single transitional units, close to their returning locality.

Petersilia (1999) argues that recent developments in US transitional support services have been characterised by an increasing emphasis on monitoring and a corresponding decrease in the provision of support services. This reflects both the hardening of community attitudes towards offenders and the increasing availability of relatively cheap surveillance technology. Interestingly, the increased level of surveillance is producing record high breach rates that are in turn exacerbating prison crowding and prompting a review of prisoner monitoring requirements.

Recent developments on the support side of the equation have focused on employment services and vocational training. These are typically targeted at high-risk prisoners and are designed to provide intensive, long term support. The program literature stresses the need to invest in finding the 'right' placement the first time in order to develop prisoner confidence and motivation.

## United Kingdom

In the past decade, the policy framework underpinning UK correctional services has been developed and refined. As a result, the provision of offender resettlement and after care services has been legitimised as the core business of correctional authorities, along with sentence management and the delivery of custodial rehabilitation programs. This gives it unprecedented status in the history of UK correctional services (Home Office, 1999).

A key focus of activity has been the integration of custodial and community based parole functions to achieve better continuity of service. The location of parole officers within prisons has been central to these efforts.

Inevitably, attempts to realise policy objectives regarding transitional support services have been thwarted by broader prison management processes that see prisoners released with short notice and/or from prisons located far from their home areas. This has prompted more recent attempts to enhance prisoner exit planning and case management. It has also generated substantial interest in the operation of regional prisons and local pre-release or resettlement facilities to ensure that all prisoners exit custody from a location

close to their community of return. This model in turn facilitates the development of a 'community partnerships' approach in which local service providers and businesses are engaged in supporting prisoner transition.

The UK correctional framework emphasises transitional support services that address housing, employment and social isolation. While US services are highly targeted according to carefully specified risk criteria, the UK transitional support services tend to be more universal in nature, relying on prisoner self-referral and/or needs-based assessment by the allocated case manager.

## Australia

While the lack of written material makes identification of Australian trends more difficult, some themes emerge from discussion with correctional administrators.

In the past decade, most Australian jurisdictions have invested in residential programs that provides community-based supervision of sentenced prisoners in the pre-parole phase. These range from larger scale, state run pre-release centres that are considered part of the prison stock, through to community-based work release hostels and small community-based houses run by charitable organisations.

Similarly, several jurisdictions have developed some form of intensive community-based supervision that provides accelerated movement of prisoners to community, often with electronic monitoring and/or restrictive release conditions.

There is no evidence, however, of a systematic, planned approach to transitional support services. It appears that specific initiatives most commonly arise in response to a unique set of local conditions and are developed in the absence of a broader conceptual framework. Many jurisdictions reported that post-release support services were the product of ad hoc, community driven initiatives and lacked any sense of cohesion.

## 3. The Impact of Transitional Support Services

### 3.1 State of the Literature

The transitional support literature is characterised by a range of claims regarding attainment of program goals, but little evaluative data.

Where programs are the subject of formal evaluation, outcome studies generally describe the program being evaluated and give recidivism rates for the participants without providing any information on the rates for a comparable group of individuals who did not participate. Where comparison data is provided, it is generally from a matched group rather than a randomly assigned control, thus undermining the confidence with which results can be interpreted.

Predictably, those studies that consider recidivism are difficult to compare. Firstly, re-offending is measured variably using re-arrest, re-conviction and in some cases, re-incarceration data. To compound this, parole violations appear to be treated differently from one study to the next. Finally, the follow up period can vary considerably from six months to three years. These technical issues are overlaid by the fact that many programs are specifically targeted, thereby undermining the validity of cross-program comparisons.

Transitional support services have generally been excluded from the large scale meta-analyses that have characterised recent corrections research. This may reflect the reality that program innovation typically occurs at the hands of community based agencies with minimal research capacity. It is also indicative of the relatively low priority, both fiscally and strategically, afforded these programs by correctional administrators.

The net result is a literature base that is descriptive, rather than evaluative, and heavily focussed on US and UK programs. Evaluation - even documentation - of Australian transitional support services is extremely limited.

Because the literature is so under-developed and disparate, it is useful to identify core transitional support service types as a means of structuring the review of available research evidence.

Naturally, services can be grouped and clustered in a number of different ways and in reality, programs will often span individual service types. This paper identifies five core service types: Pre-Release Preparation; Temporary Leave/Work Release; Release with Residential Supervision; Release with Community Based Supervision; and Bridging (Post-Release) Support Services. This last category is broken down into services that focus on employment, housing and personal support respectively.

Arguably, parole should be considered the ultimate form of transitional support with its joint emphasis on regulation and rehabilitation and its guarantee of accelerated progression to community. However, given the recent review of Community Corrections, parole has been excluded from the current analysis.

The discussion that follows describes key features of each primary service type and provides a summary of available research evidence regarding its impact on prisoners' experience of the transition from custody to community, recidivism and/or prison bed utilisation.

### **3.2 Pre- Release Preparation**

#### **Key Features**

These programs aim to provide prisoners approaching the end of their sentence with the skills and information necessary to facilitate a successful return to community.

They are generally delivered in the context of an exit plan by custodial staff and/or treatment professionals within the prison setting. Community based corrections staff may be involved in needs assessment, program intake and delivery. A more recent development has seen the involvement of community-based agencies in pre-release preparation as part of a broader bridging/post-release support intervention.

Pre-release preparation programs may incorporate a wide range of topics including community resources, emergency assistance, housing support, employment support, substance abuse support, relapse prevention, family reunification, victim issues, problem solving, budgeting and financial assistance. Shand (1996) reviewed several of these programs and produced an exhaustive list of their various components.

Pre-release programs vary considerably in their intensity, duration and primary delivery mode. While all provide basic information regarding available community supports, some place a greater emphasis on providing prisoners with a supportive context in which to discuss concerns and anxieties regarding release.

One of the barriers to provision of appropriate advice and information to prisoners in an over-stretched system where face to face contact is not always possible, is the high level of illiteracy among the prison population. The use of video and internet technology, backed up by personal advice, is becoming increasingly widespread. In the UK, for example, Wandsworth Prison, is working on the production of a video providing basic pre-release information to prisoners which will be played on a continuous loop in the reception suite and on individual close circuit TV.

## Impact

There is substantial evidence to suggest that prisoners find the provision of pre-release preparation useful in facilitating a return to community (see for example, Haines, 1990; Shand, 1996; NACRO, 1998b).

While there is little formal evidence regarding optimum program design, commentators appear to favour programs that rely on multi-media delivery, involve ex-prisoners in their design and/or delivery, include external community-based service providers and sit within the context of a broad policy framework that validates the role of correctional services in community reintegration (Gonsa, 1987; Saxton, 1991; NACRO, 1998b).

UK research suggests that while formal policies may mandate the provision of pre-release preparation programs, the extent to which these services are actually delivered depends on operational factors within individual prisons, particularly the attitude of senior management (Carlisle, 1994). This is supported by more recent research that finds the level of support extended to prisoners is highly variable throughout the system despite a concerted policy emphasis on pre-release preparation (UK Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000).

Recent pre-release program design in both the UK and USA appears to favour a minimalist approach as a universal measure, with more sophisticated programs available to specifically targeted prisoner sub-groups.

### **3.3 Temporary Leave/Work Release**

#### **Key Features**

Temporary leave programs are generally used as a means of transitional preparation for prisoners who have served a specified component of their sentence. They are designed to develop prisoners' job skills and work ethic in order to increase the likelihood of employment on release and assist the transition back to community. Special categories of leave exist to facilitate family and community reintegration objectives.

Leave duration may vary from two days to several weeks though typically, a portion of each week is spent within the prison. This restricts the impact of temporary leave on available prison capacity as participants' beds are rarely 'back-filled'.

Program parameters are typically prescribed in legislation and program intake is determined administratively.

#### **Impact**

The research evidence regarding temporary release programs is mixed. In their review of the literature, Turner and Petersilia (1996a) conclude that there is good evidence to suggest that work release programs achieve the goal of preparing prisoners for release and facilitating their adjustment to the community. There is some evidence that work release impacts positively on prisoners' employment prospects post-release, but little evidence that it has any meaningful impact on recidivism.

An evaluation of Florida's work release program (Gordon and Circo, 1986) that randomly assigned prisoners to work release or a comparison group, found no differences between the groups over a two year period for any of the recidivism measures, although there was evidence that they produced better employment outcomes for participants and cost-savings for prison administrators.

A retrospective analysis of Massachusetts prisoners (LeClaire, 1988) found lower one-year recidivism rates among males participating in community pre-release programs. Similarly, a separate analysis by LeClaire and Guarino-Ghezzi (1991), found that males who participated in both community pre-release programs and temporary leave programs had lower one year recidivism rates than males released directly from prison. Though these trends held after controlling for a variety of prisoner characteristics, neither study involved random assignment of participants.

The most comprehensive and arguably, most rigorous, study of work release was conducted by Turner and Petersilia (1996a & b) and involved over 2,500 prisoners in Washington State. This study found that the program achieved its most important goal of preparing prisoners for final release and facilitating their return to community. It did not, however, reduce offender recidivism, nor did it reduce the cost of providing a correctional response.

These findings were replicated in a recent evaluation of the Canadian work release program (Grant and Beal, 1998). This study concluded that work release meets the general rehabilitative goals of the correctional service including preparation of offenders for their eventual release. It did not, however, find any statistical difference in recidivism rates for those participating in work release and those released directly to the community.

### **3.4 Release with Residential Supervision**

#### Key Features

Residential community corrections facilities are generally used as an alternative to continued imprisonment for offenders approaching the end of their sentence or as a special condition of parole for prisoners whose application would otherwise be denied. More recently they have served as a 'half way back' option for parole violators.

Residential community corrections programs typically comprise free-standing, non-secure buildings that accommodate offenders currently on sentence. Residents regularly depart to attend work, school and community programs. The capacity of these services is often considered part of the jurisdiction's total prison stock. They may be operated by government, private and not for profit organisations. Service sub-types include pre-release centres, work release centres, residential treatment programs and independent living houses.

It is worth noting that the term residential corrections is also used - particularly in the American literature - to include post-release accommodation accessed voluntarily by released prisoners and community based residential facilities that serve as a sentencing alternative in their own right, rather than a pre-release option. These broader applications of the term do not apply here.

In tracing the development of residential community corrections in the US, Parent (1990) notes that these facilities were originally conceived as a vehicle for achieving the public policy goal of rehabilitation. Many provided specialised treatment targeted at specific prisoner sub-groups. With the decline of the rehabilitative ideal in the US in particular, residential community corrections facilities have been increasingly used as a direct alternative to prison for selected offenders or as a pre-release option to free up prison beds. Parent argues that this development is producing a mix of populations with undifferentiated needs that threatens the viability of the small-scale community corrections model.

## Impact

Latessa and Allen (1982) reviewed over forty studies that examined the post-release recidivism of prisoners released from community residential facilities in the US. The degree of methodological rigour varies considerably between these studies. The two with a true experimental design found no difference between the re-offending rates of community residential clients and the control group. The results of the remaining quasi-experimental studies were mixed, with the majority showing no statistically significant differences between the two groups.

While there is a wealth of more recent, *descriptive* material available regarding residential correctional programs, few of these incorporate well designed outcome evaluations.

The exception is the comprehensive and on-going evaluation of the Massachusetts re-integration program (LeClair, 1990). This program incorporates work, education and home release, pre-release centres and post-release accommodation, increasingly liberal visiting privileges and classification programs that provide movement among institutions in descending order of security level and size and ultimately place prisoners close to their community of return. Significantly, the Massachusetts reintegration program begins from the point of reception and runs throughout the entire sentence.

Prisoners released from Massachusetts pre-release centres had one year recidivism rates between one half and two thirds of those released from more closed institutions, the average being 14% and 25% respectively. To overcome the selection effect arising from the fact that only better risk prisoners were likely to be included in the pre-release centre program, the study uses a 'base expectancy recidivism rate'. When base expectancy rates were compared to actual recidivism rates, reintegrative program participants produced actual recidivism rates well below the expected rate, while non-participants' actual recidivism rates were roughly equal to their expected rate (LeClair, 1990).

### **3.5 Release with Community Based Supervision**

#### Key Features

A range of new programs are emerging that are based on more intensive forms of supervision and support than standard parole.

Intensive supervision may be employed as a community safety enhancement to standard community-based sanctions, as a 'front-end' diversionary mechanism specifically designed to reduce prison crowding or as a 'back-end' transitional support strategy. It is this last application that is relevant to the current analysis.

As a transitional support strategy, intensive supervision and support may be used as an alternative to continued imprisonment for offenders allowed to complete their sentence in the community or as a special condition of parole for prisoners whose application would otherwise be denied.

Intensive supervision programs often incorporate a range of sanctions and monitoring mechanisms including curfew, house arrest/home detention, electronic monitoring, drug and/or alcohol monitoring, mandatory referrals/special treatment conditions and community service and restitution.

Commentators have questioned the fundamental difference between intensive supervision and standard parole. Byrne, Lurigio and Baird (1989) argue that the following features characterise intensive supervision programs:

- Supervision is extensive. Participants have multiple weekly contact with supervising authorities. Collateral contacts with employers and family members often feature.
- Supervision is focused. Monitoring activities concentrate on specific behavioural regulations governing curfews, drug use, travel, employment and community service.
- Supervision is ubiquitous. Program participants are frequently subject to random drug tests and curfew checks.
- Supervision is graduated. Program participants commonly proceed through programs in a series of phases each of which involves a gradual withdrawal of supervisory requirements.
- Supervision is strictly enforced. Penalties for new arrests and non-compliance with program conditions are generally swift and severe.
- Supervision is coordinated. Program participants are generally monitored by specially selected and trained staff who are part of a larger, specialised unit.

The New Jersey intensive supervision program (Clear, Flynn and Shapiro, 1987) embodies most of these principles. It is the largest program of its kind in the US that targets prisoners on release from custody. Prospective candidates must participate in the development of a comprehensive transitional plan that includes the identification of a community sponsor and network team. The community sponsor is a family member, friend or program volunteer with whom the prisoner resides on exit. The sponsor agrees to perform a range of monitoring and support functions with the support of a statutory officer. The program runs seven days per week, with after hours on-call/re-call support. Caseload size is between 20-25 offenders per officer.

## Impact

While there has been considerable research interest in the impact of intensive statutory supervision, much of this—including the well known evaluations of the Georgia Intensive Probation Supervision service—has focussed on programs that are designed as 'front-end' diversionary initiatives rather than 'back-end' transitional support mechanisms.

An evaluation of the New York program described above (Pearson, 1988) compared the recidivism rates of offenders subject to intensive supervision and those experiencing standard prison/parole arrangements. One year follow-up indicated that 11% of the intensively supervised group were re-arrested compared with 26 % of the comparison group. Two year follow-up found re-arrest rates of 25% and 35% respectively. While these results appear encouraging, it is worth noting that the experimental groups were matched, not randomly assigned.

The New Jersey evaluation also contains a comprehensive comparative cost analysis of intensive supervision that found this intervention to be approximately 30% less expensive than standard prison/parole arrangements.

A review of over seventy intensive supervision programs (Fulton and Stone, 1992) concluded that the emphasis of these programs should shift from exclusive incapacitation and punitive measures to a more integrated approach of intervention, support and risk control strategies. This finding builds on the work of Petersilia and Turner (1990) who suggest that combining programs stressing rehabilitative objectives with statutory supervision will lead to more sustained behaviour change.

In reviewing comprehensive evaluative data on three programs, Byrne, Lurigio and Baird (1989:37) conclude that 'if lower recidivism rates are the primary goal, funding should be directed at employment, education and substance abuse treatment, rather than new electronic surveillance equipment. Intensive supervision may be marketed to the public by emphasising special deterrent effects, when in fact rehabilitative effects are what should be monitored.'

Another subject of research interest has been the efficacy of different levels of supervision/required contacts. Byrne, Lurigio and Baird (1989) conclude that there is no available evidence to suggest that intensive daily contact is more effective in controlling offender behaviour than a level of, say, two contacts per week. They argue that while it is logical that supervision 'dosage' reaches a point of diminishing returns, it is not yet known where that point lies.

Research evidence aside, they conclude that contact standards may well be a function of perception than of demonstrated need. If multiple contacts will prompt increased use of the program and ease community concern, then this may be necessary, particularly in a program's early stages.

### 3.6 Bridging (Post Release) Support

Traditionally known as 'post-release' services, these programs are referred to here as 'bridging' services to reflect the reality that many commence in custody and carry through to the post-release phase.

Bridging support services are the primary form of assistance to prisoners released directly to the community and in some cases, to those released on parole. They are most commonly provided by the voluntary sector, though government and private enterprise may also be involved in direct service delivery. A clear distinction is generally drawn between the reintegration support provided by post-release services and the statutory supervision provided as condition of release.

Bridging support services traditionally comprise employment, housing and personal support, including financial/material aid. Each of these elements will be considered in turn, though in practice, they are often delivered in an integrated service model.

In view of recent trends, it is surprising that little program documentation was located regarding bridging support services with a substance abuse focus. Though some interesting approaches are emerging (see for example, the San Diego Parole Partnership Program (Petersilia, 1999)), these form the community-based arm of what are primarily custodial treatment programs and as such, are beyond the scope of the current analysis. As noted earlier, however, the drug treatment continuum that begins in custody and flows to the community provides a framework for considering the broader transitional support needs of prisoners.

#### 3.6.1. Bridging (Post-Release) Support: Employment

##### Key Features

A range of bridging support services exist with an employment focus. Their rationale lies in the well established link between post-release employment and reduced recidivism (see for example, Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998; Petersilia, 1999). Key service sub-types include:

- Vocational advice and guidance.

These services provide a range of supports including basic literacy, numeracy and life skills programs; job seeking programs and assistance with resume development and interview techniques. They may be targeted to meet the specific needs of gender or ethnic sub-populations. Examples include the Keyskills Project, UK and the HIMMAT Project, Halifax, UK (Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998).

- Job search and placement.

These services identify appropriate job vacancies and communicate these directly to prisoners approaching the end of their sentence or already in the community. They generally provide a range of related support services including job-seeking training, assistance with applications and interviews and employer liaison and support. Many services operate on a community-partnerships model, developing relationships with local employers and locating their own vacancy data independent of the broader employment services. Examples include the Ohio Job Linkage Program, USA (Unwin, Mayers and Wilt, 1999) and STEP, Rotherham, UK (Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998).

- Job creation in the intermediate labour market.

These programs provide subsidised, time-limited jobs with training as a pathway back to the mainstream labour market. They deliver a period of employment that helps keep participants in contact with the habits of work and acquire some new skills. Participants gain recent work experience and current job references. Examples include the Apex Trust, Bedfordshire, UK (Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998) and the Center for Employment Opportunities, New York City, US (Finn, 1998a).

- Employer support.

These programs aim to tackle employer discrimination and mistrust of offenders directly. They typically research employers' recruitment attitudes and practices and seek to modify these through a range of mechanisms including written material, support forums, individual liaison and promotion of government grants and subsidies. Some services maintain a register of willing employers and/or job vacancies while others refer these to specialist job placement services. Examples include Equal Access to Employment, UK (Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998) and Project Re-Enterprise (Moses, 1996).

The issue of employer discrimination is highlighted in a recent study (NACRO, 1998) of the employment experience of 200 ex-offenders in the London area in which 42% of respondents reported that their criminal record was explicitly cited by employers as a primary reason for their lack of success at interview. The actual figure is likely to be higher as many employers do not provide an explanation of their recruitment decisions.

In the past decade, there has been an increasing tendency to extend employment services back into the prison environment. Initiatives such as the Ohio Job Linkage Program (Unwin, Mayers and Wilt, 1999) provide comprehensive prisoner training, operate job fairs, conduct employer/employee matching and run interviews via teleconference for prisoners approaching their release date.

Chicago's Safer Foundation program (Finn, 1998b) targets high-risk prisoners with multiple needs including substance abuse and mental illness. It uses a small group, peer based approach in pre- and post-release education programs and provides special case managers to help clients address transitional problems for up to a year after they have secured employment. It offers a range of specialist programs targeted at ethnic minorities.

Project Re-Enterprise in the United States (Moses, 1996) enlists the participation of local business leaders in educational initiatives to hone the job-seeking skills of inmates. In the process of developing prisoners, the project seeks to broaden employers' perception of prisoners and the correctional community. Employer recruitment is a primary function of this program, requiring dedicated and specialist staff support. A useful by-product is the pool of respected business and community leaders who become prisoner advocates and informed stakeholders in the correctional system.

In the US, Project RIO (Finn, 1998c) operates within prisons to provide job readiness assessment and testing, job preparation skills and intensive case management aimed at securing employment from the date of release. Job interviews are generally conducted on-site, with the cooperation of employers or via special temporary leave permits. In the community, support is offered to both employers and ex-offenders for up to one year. A specialist support stream is available to address broader post-release support needs such as housing.

### Impact

Process evaluation of a range of post-release employment services in the UK (Fletcher, Woodhill and Herrington, 1998) identified some important service design features. In summary services should:

- be multi-faceted, spanning a range of employment service sub-types but as a minimum, incorporate job placement and employer education/support
- form part of a coherent multi agency strategy to reduce unemployment among ex-offenders
- have the necessary partnerships in place to address broader client needs such as substance abuse and homelessness
- recognise the long term nature of employment reintegration with ex-offenders
- incorporate the principle of progression in which reintegration is seen as a series of intermediate stages beginning in custody and underpinned by an *expectation* of setbacks and detours
- focus on the quality and suitability of employment, thus minimising the likelihood of further alienation that arises when the client/job match is poor.

Independent evaluation of Project RIO described above, (Menon, Blakely, Carmichael and Silver, 1992) found that participation in the program was a statistically significant predictor of post-release employment. Based on a one year follow-up of a matched sample, 69% of program participants found employment compared with 36% of the comparison group. Job retention was significantly higher for program participants than

non-participants. With regard to recidivism, one year after release, 23% of high risk program participants were re-incarcerated compared to 38% of high risk non-participants.

Evaluation of Project Re-Enterprise that engages local businesses in custodial training and job-seeking programs found that 76% of employers would be more likely to recruit ex-offenders as a result of their participation in the program (Moses, 1996).

### 3.6.2 Bridging (Post-Release) Support: Housing

#### Key Features

A range of bridging support services exist with a housing focus. Their rationale lies in the well established link between post-release housing and reduced recidivism (see for example, McCarthy and Hagan, 1991; Ramsay, 1996). Key service sub-types include:

- Housing information, referral and advocacy.

These services are often provided in custody by community-based agencies or specially trained prison staff to ensure accommodation is planned prior to release. Prisoners may access the service voluntarily or be referred by the allocated case manager. In some facilities, all prisoners at high risk of homelessness on release are referred to the housing service at the point of reception to custody.

Prison based housing support services offer support to short term prisoners to retain existing accommodation, oversee temporary leave to locate and secure housing prior to release, organise information sessions delivered by local housing providers and assist with applications for public and private housing. Examples include the Liverpool Resettlement Scheme (HM Prison Service, 2000) and the Buckley Hall Prison Housing Advice Centre (Home Office, 2000). NACRO's UK Prisons Link Unit provides comprehensive training to prison officers to operate specialist housing information and advice services to prisoners approaching release (NACRO, 1998b).

Housing information and support services are also provided to prisoners on exit from custody by specially funded programs attached to local housing services. These services generally liaise with local private and public housing providers to promote access by ex-offenders; maintain a registry of vacancies; provide assistance with applications and offer financial assistance and/or provision of rental guarantees to landlords as required.

Plans have recently been announced in the UK to contract the operation of prison based housing services to local housing agencies as a means of ensuring better through care of prisoners following their release from custody (Presswire, 17.7.00).

- Transitional accommodation.

These services provide short to medium term accommodation to prisoners immediately following release. Models include large hostel facilities with 24 hour staff, small satellite houses with visiting support and supported lodgings schemes in which the service provider engages private landlords in the provision of accommodation with guarantees of compensation for damage and/or non-payment of rent. Examples include the NACRO Supported Lodgings Scheme (NACRO, 1998b) and the SWEP housing program (Melbourne City Mission, 2000).

- Skill development.

These services deliver specialist life skills training programs to particularly vulnerable and/or chaotic individuals aimed at increasing their capacity to cope in shared accommodation. Training may also cover accommodation-seeking, forms of government assistance and personal financial management.

### Impact

A number of studies confirm that housing support services achieve the goal of easing prisoner transition from custody to community (Carlisle, 1994; Carnaby, 1998; Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000). These studies identify a range of design imperatives for bridging support services with a housing focus including:

- early needs assessment and intervention to ensure short term prisoners maintain existing accommodation and longer term prisoners have accommodation in place *prior* to release
- enhanced pre-release information and support, preferably delivered by a community based housing service
- the capacity to engage with a worker and maintain meaningful contact pre- and post-release
- provision of advocacy and support to streamline payment of social security benefits and/or re-establishment grants
- commitment to addressing long term housing needs alongside transitional accommodation requirements.

While the link between homelessness and crime is well established, no studies were located that examined the impact of prisoner housing support services on re-offence rates.

### 3.6.3 Bridging (Post-Release) Support: Personal Support

#### Key Features

A range of bridging support services exist to deliver emotional and psychological support to address the fear, loneliness and low self-esteem frequently reported by ex-prisoners. A

focus on family reintegration issues is common. These services seek to provide a source of community connection for released prisoners and, over time, foster the development of broader social ties. Their rationale lies in the well documented link between social isolation and recidivism (Haines, 1990). They often incorporate forms of practical assistance and may serve as a platform for more targeted, problem-specific interventions. Key service sub-types include:

- Case Management Services/Professional Support

These services provides support and assistance to prisoners to reduce social isolation, address family reunification issues, deal with discrimination and stigma and provide practical assistance including financial support and assistance with accommodation, employment and substance abuse.

- Peer Support

Based on self-help principles, these services offer supportive peer associations in recognition of the fact that the reception extended to ex-prisoners by the community is often more antagonistic than accepting. Drop-in centres, crisis telephone support and supported accommodation are common service types. Ex-offender organisations may also play a broader role in advocating for the reform and development of pre- and post-release services.

- Mentoring/Community Sponsors

These services draw on a pool of volunteers to provide personal support, companionship, mentoring and more practical services including material aid, transitional accommodation and assistance with finding housing and employment. Some programs match prisoners at risk of social isolation on release with a community sponsor or mentor who establishes a relationship with the prisoner in custody and follows through with community support on release (Celinska, 2000). In the US in particular, community sponsors are used to provide supervision and/or support to prisoners released early with intensive community supervision requirements (see for example, Byrne, Lurigio and Baird, 1989).

## Impact

In his review of the British aftercare literature, Haines (1990) concludes that personal support services are legitimised by strong research evidence that indicates a marked difference in the performance of socially isolated prisoners compared to those with strong community ties. While he cautions against simple cause and effect explanations, Haines concludes that social isolation is a useful conceptual tool in developing a strategy for resettling most released prisoners. Haines' work suggests that personal support services should begin in custody, address a broad range of prisoner needs and be intensive in nature.

On a broader level, there is good evidence regarding the merits of support transitional programs that develop protective factors within the prisoner and his/her release environment (Chapman and Hough, 1999). These protective factors increase the individual's resilience to further offending. Internal protective factors include problem-solving skills, social competence and a sense of autonomy and identity. External protective factors include family cohesion, relationships that provide a pro-social belief system, employment and other social constructs that provide opportunities for engagement in pro-social activities and deliver a sense of connection and belonging.

Chapman and Hough (1999) argue that many prisoners will need to develop internal protective factors before they can benefit from external protective factors such as employment and relationships.

While it appears that social isolation and interpersonal needs are a legitimate focus of transitional support at a theoretical level, no research was located regarding the impact of individual services. Indeed, personal support programs appear to be one of the least examined and documented forms of post-release service delivery.

### **3.7 Overview of the Research Evidence**

It is useful to review the research evidence against each of the core program objectives commonly ascribed to transitional support services.

#### **Easing Prisoner Transition to Community**

The extent to which a program eases the prisoner's experience of return to community is typically measured by prisoner self-report data. The views of support services and community based correctional authorities may also be sought.

There is strong evidence that transitional programs are successful in easing prisoner return to community. To achieve this end, the program should address the needs identified by prisoners themselves. Research shows a remarkable consistency in these needs. They include practical support, in particular, assistance with housing, employment and income support; emotional support, including assistance with interpersonal problems, loneliness and family reunification; and health support, including assistance with substance abuse and mental illness (Haines, 1990; NACRO, 1998b).

Research also suggests that the program should be highly visible in the custodial setting, with clear entry pathways, that the program should begin in custody and continue through the transitional/post release period and that the program should be designed to support the development of consistent relationships.

## Reducing Recidivism

Recidivism rates are still the most common form of outcome measure applied to transitional support services. As noted previously, however, the research is plagued with a range of technical and methodological problems.

Nevertheless, there is good evidence arising from the longitudinal Massachusetts evaluations that service systems offering graded prisoner re-entry options including work release and release with residential and/or intensive community supervision achieve enhanced recidivism outcomes. There is some evidence that programs which offer support and surveillance, rather than surveillance alone, are more effective in reducing subsequent offending.

Interestingly, there is no evidence that work release programs alone impact on the re-offending rates of participants.

It appears that the link between reduced re-offending and stable post-release housing, employment and social connections is so well established that these three areas of practical assistance should be a primary focus of transitional support services that seek to impact on recidivism.

## Reducing the Prison Population

There is no evidence to indicate that transitional support services that provide accelerated release to community-based forms of supervision actually reduce prisoner numbers. Indeed, because these forms of service have often involved rigorous surveillance and monitoring regimes, they may inadvertently expand prisoner volume through increased breach activity.

## 3.8 Summary

There is strong evidence that transitional support programs ease the movement from custody to community and good evidence that they assist in delaying or preventing further offending when provided as part of an integrated systematic response. There is no evidence that transitional support mechanisms providing accelerated return to community actually alleviate prison crowding over time.

#### 4. Sentenced Prisoners Discharged from Victorian Prisons

Below is an overview of all sentenced prisoners discharged from Victorian prisons in the 1999/00 financial year. Data is sourced from the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner. Note that in addition to sentenced prisoners, a further 970 unsentenced prisoners were discharged during 1999/00.

##### Sentenced Prisoners Discharged in Victoria By Discharging Location 1 July 1999-30 June 2000

Discharging Location	Number	Percent
Ararat	68	2
Barwon	296	8
Beechworth	225	6
Bendigo	73	2
Dhurringile	256	7
Fulham	819	22
Langi Kal Kal	137	4
Loddon	215	6
Melbourne Assessment	350	10
Metropolitan Women's	247	7
Port Philip	533	15
Tarrengower	89	2
Wron Wron	343	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3651</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Note:**

The majority (68 %) of all discharges are made from rural/regional prisons; 32% from metropolitan prisons.

The three largest discharge locations account for less than half of all discharges: prisoner exits are dispersed across thirteen prison locations.

##### Sentenced Prisoners Discharged in Victoria by Security Classification 1 July 1999-30 June 2000

Classification Level	Number	Percent
A2	245	7
B	2124	58
C2	408	11
C1	874	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>3651</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Note:**

The majority (58%) of all discharges are made from a B classification.

Sentenced Prisoners Discharged in Victoria  
by Time Served in Prison  
1 July 1999-30 June 2000

Length of Stay	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 1 month	384	10	10
1 < 3 months	787	21	31
3 < 6 months	1087	30	61
6 < 9 months	507	14	75
9 < 12 months	320	9	84
1 < 2 years	334	9	93
2 < 3 years	95	3	96
Over 3 years	137	4	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>3651</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N/A</b>

Note:

The majority (61%) of all sentenced discharges occur after less than six months in prison; 31% of all sentenced discharges occur after less than three months in prison.

Sentenced Prisoners Discharged In Victoria  
by Parole Status  
1 July 1999-30 June 2000

Parole Status	Number	Percent
Unconditional Release	2709	74
Release on Parole	309	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>3651</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note:

The vast majority (74%) of all sentenced prisoners discharged in Victoria are not subject to supervision by the Adult Parole Board.

In summary, in 1999/00 most Victorian prison discharges were made from a B security classification, at a rural/regional prison, after a period of less than six months in custody and without parole conditions.

## 5. Current State of Victorian Transitional Support

### 5.1 Service Framework

The Victorian transitional support service framework is extremely under-developed at present. There is minimal program documentation to inform and support service delivery:

- The *Corrections Act 1986* (as amended) and the *Corrections Regulations 1988* (as amended) provide the legislative foundation for the provision of correctional services. There is no explicit recognition in these documents of the correctional system's obligation to provide transitional support services.
- Current Department of Justice publications that describe the role and functions of the corrections system (for example, *The Victorian Adult Corrections System, 1999*, *The Department of Justice Annual Report, 2000*) make few, if any, references to transitional support services. Transitional support does not appear to have been conceptualised as a primary system function.

There is, however, some evidence that this is changing. Consistent with current Government policy to provide enhanced bridging support to people exiting prison, the proposed strategy to reduce offending (2000) identifies the development of pre- and post-release support standards and options as a vital component of an integrated, cross-departmental approach to offender rehabilitation and reintegration.

- There is no statement of the purpose, specific objectives and/or desired outcomes of existing transitional support services.
- The *Correctional Policy and Management Standards* (1995) contain a multitude of outcome statements that inform the delivery of Victorian prison services. While different standards documents apply to men and women's prisons, requirements regarding the provision of transitional support are virtually identical for all prisons. By way of example, the full range of requirements regarding transitional support contained within the women's prison standards are:

#### Community Involvement and Preparation for Release

"Outcome:

Sentenced prisoners are systematically prepared for release, including involvement of community agencies".

**Output:**

The prison manager:

- (a) provides programs which prepare prisoners for release, incorporating modules on practical areas such as housing, Social Security, Legal Aid, operating bank accounts, financial planning and identification documents.
- (b) encourages community agencies with expertise in providing services for women to provide a range of programs and support services within and external to the prison during the pre-release and post-release periods."  
(Section 31, page 47).

- The *Correctional Policy and Management Standards* are translated into Prison Service Agreements for private prison operators and into the CORE Service Agreement for public prisons. The requirements regarding transitional support services are virtually identical for all prisons. By way of example, the full range of requirements regarding transitional support contained within the Prison Service Agreement of a major male prison provider are:

**Preparation for Release**

"The contractor must systematically prepare prisoners for release prior to their discharge, such preparation to include the provision of programs which prepare prisoners for release including modules on practical areas such as housing, social security, legal aid, operating bank accounts, financial planning and identification documents." (Clause 31)

**Community Involvement**

"The contractor must develop linkages with community agencies to promote the prison as part of the community." (Clause 32)

**Temporary Leave**

"The contractor must ensure Prisoners are able to be temporarily absent under a Custodial Community Permit from the Prison for health, justice, education, fitness, work, compassionate or reintegration reasons in accordance with the Custodial Community Permit ." (Clause 30)

- The *Correctional Policy and Management Standards* (1995) contain no expectations regarding the actual process of releasing a person from custody. Issues such as transport from the prison, packaging of prisoner possessions, immediate financial support and management of releases outside standard business hours are all determined by the individual prison operator.

- The *Correctional Policy and Management Standards* (1995) contain no reference to exit planning. Though prison operators are required to develop and maintain Individual Management Plans for all prisoners, there is no requirement that these focus on the risks and needs associated with the transition from custody to community. Though formal review of current pre-release planning mechanisms was beyond the scope of the current project, there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that approaches are highly variable across the prison system.
- Some of the *Correctional Policy and Management Standards* are translated into specific, quantitative targets or Service Delivery Outcomes (SDOs) against which the prison provider's performance is measured. Currently these targets cover areas such as prison operations, education and training, prison industries, health and treatment programs. Significantly, there are no SDOs relating to the provision of transitional support. In the absence of any routine mechanism to track provider performance in this regard, the current state of pre-release planning, preparation and support across the prison system is unclear.

## 5.2 Service Delivery

The variability of current exit planning efforts across the prison system means that there is no single entry pathway to transitional support services. Services may be accessed by prisoners directly or by referral from custodial and specialist support staff. It appears that service entry is often based on personal relationships and informal information exchange within the prison environment. Current entry arrangements do not provide a systematic way of targeting prisoners with high transitional support needs.

At present, transitional support activity occurs in three key areas:

### Pre-Release Preparation Programs

Consistent with the contractual obligations described above, all prisons provide some pre-release preparation programs. While comprehensive review of these is beyond the scope of the current exercise, anecdotal evidence suggests that present efforts are highly variable both across the system and within individual prisons. There is a general perception that the delivery of comprehensive pre-release preparation programs is a function of individual staff efforts and local management priorities rather than an institutionalised requirement. Again, however, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of this perception in the absence of routine monitoring mechanisms.

The Community Integration Program was introduced to Victorian prisons in 1991 with the aim of providing a standard set of information and skills development intervention aimed at reducing further offending and increasing the prisoner's ability to settle back into the community. Variations of the program are still offered in several prisons.

### Temporary/Work Release

Temporary Leave from Victorian prisons is managed through the Community Custodial Permit Program (CCPP). Community permits are issued to enable prisoners to participate in health, recreation and education programs not available within the prison; to assist in the administration of justice; to maintain family ties and attend to family crises; to attend work in the community and to facilitate community reintegration.

Both work release and reintegration CCPs are issued by the prison manager with the approval of the local Review and Assessment Committee. Work release is available to all C rated prisoners for up to 12 hours per day as frequently as required. Reintegration leave is available to C rated prisoners serving a minimum three years in continuous custody and in the final year of their sentence. It is available for a maximum of 8-72 hours, depending on classification, every four weeks. Both forms of leave are accessed at the request of the prisoner.

Of the 3,651 sentenced prisoners discharged from Victorian prisons in 1999/00, only 80 (2%) met the criteria for reintegration leave. A further 1282 (35%) met the criteria for work release. At best then, 63% of all people discharged from Victorian prisons in the past year had no access to temporary leave programs. In reality, this figure is probably much higher as a large proportion of those technically eligible for work release do not or can not actually access the program.

There is no evidence that temporary leave is conceptualised as a transitional support mechanism *per se*: work release in particular, appears to be seen as an entitlement in its own right. As a result, temporary leave is not routinely used to advance exit planning objectives.

### Bridging (Post-Release Services)

A number of community-based services provide pre- and post-release support to people exiting Victorian prisons. These services are clustered below according to their funding source: the Corrections Grants Program, the Bridging the Gap initiative and other funding sources.

#### *The Correctional Grants Program*

The Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner provides approximately \$0.4 million annually to a range of post-release services via the Corrections Grants program.

Program development appears fairly ad hoc: individual services have typically emerged at the initiative of community-based organizations in response to a specific need. Most are targeted at discrete prisoner sub-groups. It must be noted, however, that despite the absence of a meaningful funding commitment or a broader programmatic framework, there are excellent examples of service delivery on the ground.

Pre- and post-release services funded under the Corrections Grants program are as follows:

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Service</b>
ASCO	Prisoners aged over 21 years	Transitional support including prison visiting
Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association	Vietnamese prisoners and their families	Transitional support including prison visiting
Brosnan Centre	Younger male prisoners and younger male Indo-Chinese prisoners	Transitional support including prison visiting
Enmaraleek Society	Aboriginal prisoners	Transitional support
Prison Fellowship of Victoria	All prisoners	Transitional support to prisoners via a network of volunteers
Prison Network Ministries	Female prisoners	Transitional support and support to families via a network of volunteers
Salvation Army	All prisoners and their families	Transitional support and practical aid
VACRO	All prisoners and their families	Transitional support services including a telephone information and help line, property and financial management services and family welfare services

### *Bridging the Gap Services*

In addition to these services, the *Bridging the Gap* initiative was announced in late 2000 to deliver intensive transitional support and drug treatment services to people exiting custody. This initiative provides non-recurrent funding of \$3.5 million over two years to pilot a range of related service models. The initiative aims to deliver support to a total of 500 people per year. This represents approximately 14% of all sentenced discharges from Victorian prisons in 1999/00. Five services are funded, each with a distinct target group:

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Proposed Annual Client Throughput</b>
ASCO	Older males with few family or social supports and older males with mental health issues	100
Brosnan Centre	Younger males, aged 17-25 years	100
Melbourne Citymission	Females	70
VACRO	Older males with dependent children	160
Westernport Drug and Alcohol Service	Indo-Chinese and other prisoners returning to the Dandenong/Frankston area	70

### *Other Transitional Support Services*

Aside from the two categories of OCSC funded services described above, a range of other services provide transitional support to prisoners. Many are offered from the emergency and transitional housing sector. Some, such as the Melbourne Citymission's Supporting Women Exiting Prison (SWEP) program, are funded from charitable trusts and other private sources. Others services include generic health, legal and family support services that have chosen to adopt a particular focus on prisoners and/or their families.

As noted, while individual services offer quality programs, the development of transitional support services has been relatively ad hoc. Currently, there is no clear understanding of the full range of services that exist to meet exiting prisoner's support needs. This information would provide a useful basis for future program development and identify individual providers and provider partnerships that could participate in an expanded transitional support sector.

### *Transitional Support Provider Networks*

Significantly, there are few formal networks to link the range of services providing transitional support to people leaving prison. A notable exception is the Victorian Women's Pre- and Post-Release Providers' Network that provides an information sharing and advocacy forum in an effort to promote the development of the service model throughout the state. Similarly, a provider forum has been established to co-ordinate the operation of Bridging the Gap services across the prison system.

The establishment of more robust service networks could serve a range of operational and strategic functions including:

- co-ordination of the activities of multiple community-based transitional support providers within a single prison
- sharing of best practice approaches
- development of the service model including, for example, establishment of common entry pathways and assessment tools
- joint training and staff support
- service mapping.

### *Proposed Transitional Support Units*

The 2000/01 State Budget contained funding for three transitional units accommodating up to 60 prisoners at any one time. It is proposed that these units form part of the state's prison stock and provide a structured and residentially supervised step-out option. A working party comprising representatives of the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner and CORE is currently developing program specifications for these units.

## **5.3 Summary**

The Victorian transitional support service framework is extremely under-developed.

Though there is a requirement that all prisoners receive some form of pre-release preparation, compliance appears variable. Eligibility requirements for temporary and reintegration leave exclude 63% of all people exiting prison and community based agencies have not been funded to provide meaningful levels of transitional support.

However, there is some evidence of a renewed commitment to transitional support services for people exiting prison. This is reflected in recent decisions to fund the Bridging the Gap initiative and three transitional units providing graduated step-out programs.

**Recommendations:**

1. That the OCSC audit prison operator performance with respect to the provision of pre-release preparation programs to quantify current service levels and identify examples of good practice.
2. That the OCSC analyse the current application of temporary leave as a transitional support measure.
3. That the OCSC map existing provision of transitional support services with a particular emphasis on housing and other supports funded from non-Department of Justice sources.
4. That the OCSC facilitate the establishment of a network of current transitional support service providers to enhance co-ordination of current activities and promote sector development.

## 6. Making a Commitment to Transitional Support Services

### 6.1 The Case For Change

There are several compelling arguments in favour of an enhanced commitment to transitional support services in Victoria:

#### Easing prisoners' return to community

Society's power to imprison confers a responsibility to successfully return prisoners to the community on release from prison. This acknowledges that many prisoners face less satisfactory life circumstances on exit from prison than existed previously. There is good evidence to suggest that transitional support programs can be very useful in easing prisoners' experience of the transition from custody to community.

#### Reducing the risks of the transitional phase

The process of incarceration may actually increase a prisoner's exposure to a range of risk factors on release. The potential for drug overdose is one such factor that has featured in Victoria in recent months. The OCSC should recognise the inherent vulnerability of people exiting prison and ensure that active measures are taken to facilitate a safe transition from custody to community.

## Reducing re-offending

More than 60% of all prisoners currently under sentence in Victoria have been subject to prior imprisonment. This, combined with extreme prison crowding, provides a strong incentive for the Victorian correctional system to invest in strategies that prevent or delay the return of prisoners to custody. There is evidence that transitional support interventions can assist in this regard.

A timely response.....

The reality is that transitional support services have been the subject of renewed funding in Victoria in the past twelve months. The commitment to three new transitional support units and five new Bridging the Gap services represents a substantial investment in transitional support services. At the same time, initiatives such as home detention raise at least the theoretical possibility that electronic monitoring be applied at the back end of the system as an alternative form of supervised early release.

All of these developments, however, are occurring in a policy vacuum. There is an urgent need for the Victorian correctional system to make a formal commitment to the provision of transitional support services as a basis for the development of a service delivery framework. This will in turn link the now disparate service initiatives into a cohesive whole and increase the potential to achieve desired synergies.

## 6.2 Capturing the Commitment

### Legislation and Policy

The Victorian correctional system's obligation to provide transitional support should be broadly reflected in both the *Corrections Act* and in high level policy documentation. In this regard, it is encouraging to note the references to pre- and post-release support contained within the proposed strategy to reduce offending (2000). The commitment to providing transitional support should extend to all prisoners whether released unconditionally or on parole.

### Standards

The *Correctional Policy and Prison Management Standards (1995)* contain minimal requirements regarding transitional support. The standards should be enhanced to include, as a minimum, a range of expectations regarding exit planning, referral to community based agencies, pre-release preparation and exit procedures. These in turn should be incorporated into Prison Services Agreements and mechanisms established to enable routine monitoring of operator performance. These may include new Service Delivery Outcomes focussing on transitional support. Performance monitoring should be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, providing opportunities to identify examples of good practice.

## Case Management/ Co-ordination

The enhanced exit planning requirements must be integrated within a broader case management framework. The Differentiated Case Management (DCM) model proposed for Victorian correctional services should reflect the obligation to provide transitional support. The DCM model assumes that different prisoners have different support needs and uses sophisticated risk/needs assessment tools to assign prisoners to basic, intermediate and intensive service streams. This approach is transferable to exit planning in so far as it acknowledges the variability of prisoners' transitional support needs and provides a mechanism for matching risk and need with an appropriate level of intervention.

An exit risk /needs assessment tool should be developed and integrated within the broader case management framework. It should reflect current understanding of both the risk and protective factors that apply on release from prison. Entry to transitional support services should be directly linked to the exit risk needs assessment. Finally, enhanced exit planning mechanisms should cater for the majority of short sentenced prisoners exiting Victorian facilities.

### Recommendations:

5. That the OCSC seek amendments to the *Corrections Act (1986)* to reflect the Department of Justice's obligation to provide transitional support for all people exiting prison.
6. That the OCSC make a formal policy commitment to the provision of transitional support to all people exiting prison.
7. That the OCSC enhance the expectations regarding transitional support contained within the *Correctional Management and Policy Standards for Prisons(1995)*. These should cover, as a minimum, exit planning, pre-release preparation and procedures for managing the actual exit process.
8. That the OCSC develop mechanisms to ensure routine monitoring of prison operator performance with respect to the provision of transitional support.
9. That the OCSC enhance *exit* risk/needs assessment and planning requirements within the context of the broader corrections case management framework.

## 7. Developing A Service Framework

Current transitional support initiatives lack the benefits of a cohesive service delivery framework.

A service delivery framework can assist in structuring discussion and deliberation regarding service delivery by:

- providing an overarching set of objectives and principles
- delineating legitimate areas of activity for funding and service provision
- providing a consistent means of classifying current activity and considering existing and emerging service gaps
- conceptualising all of the elements of transitional support so that appropriate service linkages can be made.

However, a service delivery framework should not be applied rigidly to exclude new service models. This is particularly important in the transitional support arena where service innovation and evaluation are required to develop the current knowledge base. It is likely that future service models will span different service types and combine service elements in different ways. This should be encouraged, provided there is broad compliance with agreed objectives and principles of service delivery.

A transitional support service framework for Victorian services is proposed below comprising system objectives, principles and service elements.

### 7.1 Objectives

The following objectives are proposed for Victorian transitional support services:

- To ease prisoners' experience of the transition from custody to community
- To reduce the post-release risk of harm among people leaving prison
- To reduce recidivism by delaying and/or preventing further offending.

### 7.2 Principles

The following principles are proposed for Victorian transitional support services. These are considered first from a system design perspective and then from a service delivery perspective.

### 7.2.1 System Design Principles

- The transitional support system should be conceptualised broadly to incorporate alternative forms of statutory supervision that involve de-escalating external controls as well as the more traditional support services provided at the point of exit from custody.

The transitional support system should include alternative forms of statutory supervision such as temporary leave, release with community and/or residential supervision and support as well as bridging services that offer pre- and post-release support in respect of accommodation, employment and personal needs.

Statutory programs that serve as an alternative to prison in the last part of the sentence offer graded re-entry opportunities and provide a range of exit pathways to the more traditional post-release support services. Statutory programs are likely to be reserved for longer term prisoners who need intensive preparation for release.

Service planning, design and delivery should be integrated and co-ordinated across these statutory re-entry programs and the more traditional post-release service types to enhance targeting, clarify entry pathways and streamline case management arrangements.

- Community reintegration should be an on-going process rather than an event reserved for prisoners who are about to be released. It should underpin case management mechanisms and remain the primary focus of all other activity within the prison.

Exit planning and associated risk/needs assessment should be fully integrated within the standard case management framework.

For shorter term prisoners, preparation for release should begin at reception with the aim of maintaining the individual's accommodation, job and social bonds and ensuring that sufficient time is available to address post-release needs as required. Longer term prisoners require a planned intervention program matched to risk/needs assessment that reflects the long term objective of successful community return.

While there is a natural tension between the demands of prison management and the requirements of good transitional planning, these must be resolved within a framework that explicitly endorses the role of correctional services in achieving reintegration outcomes.

- The transitional support system should maximise community involvement.

Transitional support programs benefit from broader community involvement on a number of levels. Firstly, this provides an opportunity to foster community support of prisoner reintegration and develop a pool of community members with a stake in the prison

system. Secondly, community partnerships provide the only meaningful way of addressing the entrenched needs of exiting prisoners for housing, employment, personal and medical support services. Finally, prisoners come from and return to the community; relationships with community based services are likely to provide the most useful and enduring form of support.

- The transitional support system should target those at highest risk/need on release.

Not all prisoners require active intervention and support to achieve a successful return to community. Resources should be directed at those most likely to encounter problems on release. This requires an awareness of the risk and protective factors that contribute to post-release outcomes and incorporation of these into mainstream risk/need assessment methodologies.

- The transitional support system should be supported by clear entry pathways.

In order to achieve targeting objectives, clear entry criteria and pathways should be articulated for individual transitional support services. Historically, service entry has relied on informal information channels and networks within the prison and on prisoners' own assessment of their post-release support needs. This does not ensure that those at highest need and/or risk are actively targeted for transitional support. The interface between mainstream case management processes and transitional support should be formalised to address this gap.

It is also important that entry pathways reflect the reality that many prisoners do not recognise the need for transitional support until they have actually exited custody and are experiencing difficulties in the community.

- The transitional support system should meet the distinct needs of prisoner sub-groups.

There is good evidence that transitional support needs vary according to the gender, age, life stage and offending history of the prisoner and will be impacted by factors such as sentence length, substance use issues and the extent of community support networks. Program design should reflect and respond to these different support needs.

- A minimum pre-release information package should be available to all prisoners as a universal platform for more targeted transitional support services.

While the specific transitional support needs of prisoners are highly variable, it is clear that income, employment and housing are of concern to the vast majority of prisoners approaching exit, regardless of length of stay and demographic characteristics. It is also clear that prisoner awareness of the support services available on release is typically low.

An information package detailing available community supports, copies of key application forms and tailored instructions should be distributed to all prisoners as a foundation for more targeted support as required.

- The transitional support system should be designed to bridge the structural and organisational divide between prisons, community based corrections and community based services.

A vital function of exit management is the integration of activities in and outside the prison. Yet there is no clear organisational point at which this activity should occur. The transitional support service system should employ a range of strategies including co-location of key functional groups and a range of 'inside-out' responses to enhance system linkages.

- The development of transitional support services should be accompanied by a broad communication strategy that places risk within context.

Transitional support programs that involve some form of accelerated prisoner movement to less supervised options are often critically assessed by the general public, particularly in cases of misuse. Reform of transitional support services should be accompanied by a carefully designed marketing strategy that balances messages regarding public safety, offender supervision and offender support.

### 7.2.2 Service Delivery Principles

- Service delivery should begin in custody, continue throughout the immediate release period and diminish in intensity over time.

There is good evidence that transitional support services are more effective when they begin in custody and carry through to the post-release phase. This highlights the need for community based providers to maintain high visibility - perhaps even a permanent presence - within the prison setting.

Recidivism research consistently indicates the relatively high risk of reconviction in the early months after release and the relatively low risk of relapse for released offenders who have remained free of conviction for two years or more. This data is useful in considering when the most intensive support should be provided and over what period of time. Anecdotal evidence from service providers supports particularly intensive intervention at the point of release with varying intensity levels thereafter, depending on individual needs.

- Services should be based on relapse prevention principles.

Programs should incorporate the concept of relapse and its prevention. This approach recognises the reality that relapse into drug taking, further offending and/or criminogenic patterns is a daily threat in the transitional phase. The moment of relapse should be seen as an occasion to work harder to support the individual.

Relapse prevention approaches may be operationalised through the case management process and incorporate a relapse prevention/risk management plan and relapse response plan.

- Services should focus on employment, accommodation and community linkages as key protective factors in prisoner transition.

Transitional support services should aim to develop internal and external protective factors that increase an individual's resilience to further offending. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that employment, accommodation and a sense of social connection are important factors in this regard. Consistent with broader findings regarding the success of correctional programs, transitional support services should incorporate cognitive and behavioural change strategies that emphasise pro-social behaviour.

- Services should facilitate continuity of key prisoner/worker relationships.

The quality of the support relationship appears to be a significant factor in the success of transitional support services. Engagement can be enhanced by early contact within the prison system and the provision of practical assistance as an adjunct to personal and emotional support.

The potential for dependent and exclusive relationships should be minimised by linking the prisoner with a range of supports where possible.

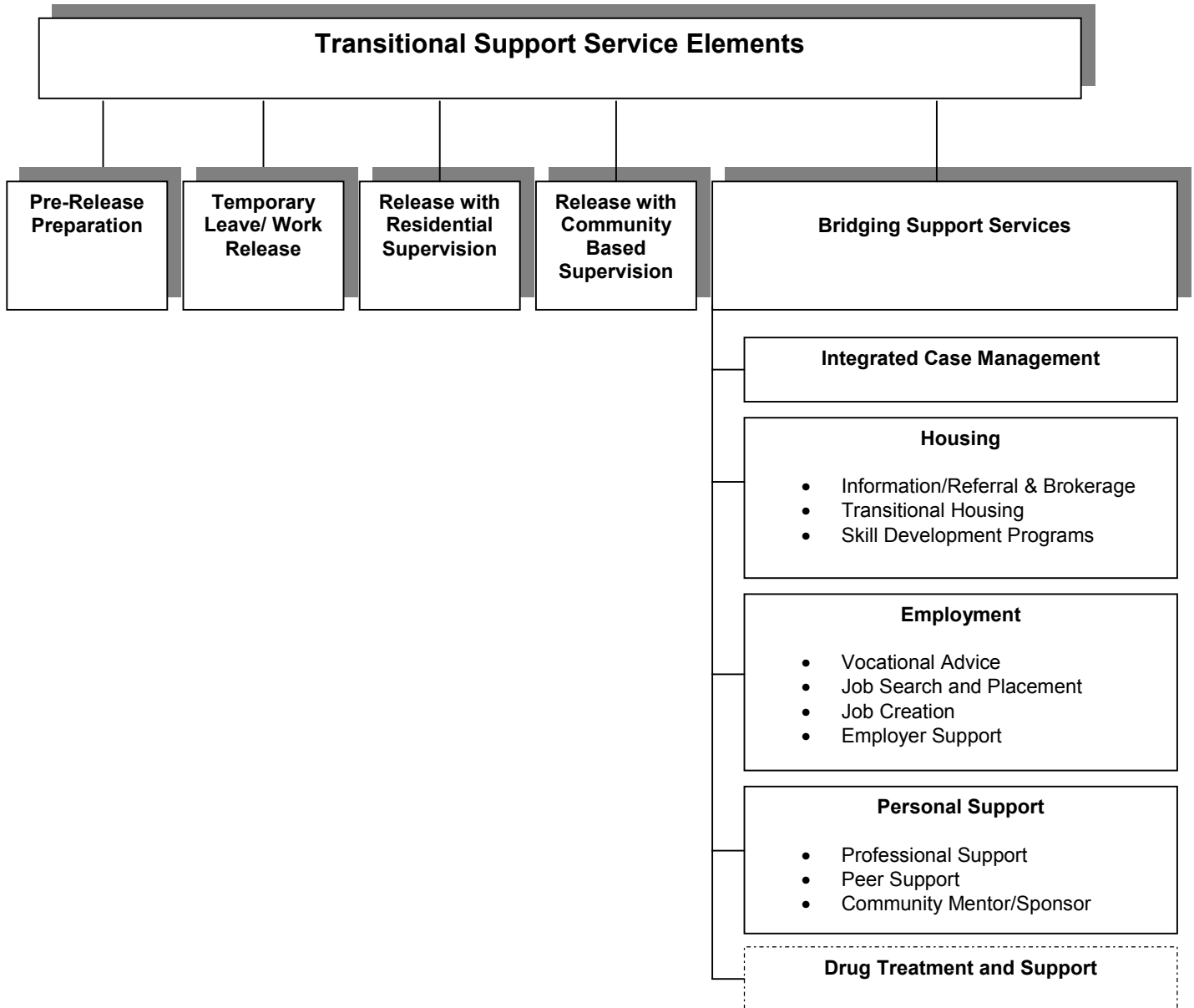
- Services should emphasise support and treatment over surveillance.

There is good evidence to suggest that transitional support services are more effective in achieving a reduction in recidivism when they emphasise housing, employment and personal support over surveillance and incapacitation measures.

Nevertheless, statutory supervision may be a core requirement of transitional support services, particularly where these involve accelerated prisoner release to community. Careful consideration should be given to monitoring requirements and techniques. Surveillance decisions should be informed by careful assessment of community risk rather than available technology.

### 7.3 Service Elements

The following service elements are proposed for Victorian transitional support services.



Key features of the framework are:

#### A Range of Service Types

Traditionally, discussion of transitional support services has been restricted to pre-release preparation programs and post-release support services typically provided by the community based sector. Yet this fails to recognise the role that temporary leave and graduated release programs play in facilitating the transition from custody to community. These service types are included in the proposed service framework.

Arguably, the transitional support framework could be even broader to include a range of education, training and treatment services delivered within the prison context. It seems important, however, to place some boundaries around the conceptualisation of transitional support while acknowledging its place within the broader rehabilitative endeavour.

#### Integrated Case Management/Co-ordination

With regard to bridging support services, the framework establishes integrated case management and single focus services as discrete service types. This reflects the reality that some people with more complex needs will require an integrated service response while others may have more limited support needs for, say, housing assistance only. Bridging the Gap services are an example of an integrated case management service while a prison-based housing brokerage program is an example of a single focussed response.

Many prisoners prefer to identify a very particular need at the point of service entry and then seek assistance with a much broader range of needs once a relationship is established. Service models should take account of this reality. The relative efficacy of services that use case management processes to deal with a range of support needs versus those that have a single problem orientation is unclear and should be subject to on-going scrutiny within the Victorian context.

#### Drug Treatment and Support

Drug treatment and support services have not traditionally been considered part of the transitional support service system. As noted earlier, while some services exist to support prisoners in the transitional phase, these have generally been treated as the community-based arm of custodial treatment programs. Comprehensive analysis of these programs is well beyond the scope of the current paper.

Within the Victorian context, there is a need for on-going assessment of the relative merits of conceptualising substance abuse services within the transitional support continuum or within the drug treatment continuum. For this reason, a drug treatment and support service type is included in blueprint form only in the proposed service framework.

It may be that a mixed model of service delivery is the best way to maximise choice and accommodate a wide range of prisoner support needs and preferences. This could comprise custodial treatment programs that reach out into the community to support prisoners during the transitional phase as well as more traditional bridging support services that have a specialist drug treatment and support capacity. Consideration of these issues should occur within the overall context of the Victorian Prisons Drug Strategy. This is consistent with the findings of the recent review of the prisons drug strategy (KPMG, 1999) that recommended a greater emphasis on transitional support interventions.

## Exit Pathways

Not all service types will be accessed by all prisoners. The framework reflects the reality that prisoners have a range of individual support needs requiring different service responses. Individual service types may be clustered in different combinations to provide alternative exit pathways. These are explored a little later.

A more detailed description of each of the service elements is provided below:

### Pre- Release Preparation

Objective	To provide prisoners approaching the end of their sentence with the skills and information necessary to facilitate a successful return to community.
Key Features	<p>Generally delivered in the context of an exit plan by custodial staff and/or treatment professionals within the prison setting.</p> <p>May also be delivered by community-based transitional support agencies as a means of 'case-finding' and engaging prisoners approaching release.</p> <p>Programs may incorporate a wide range of topics including community resources, emergency assistance, housing support, employment support, substance abuse support, relapse prevention, family reunification, victim issues, problem solving, budgeting and financial assistance.</p> <p>Programs may be delivered within the prison or in a community-based setting using temporary leave provisions.</p>
Some Service Sub-Types	<p>Basic Life Skills Programs</p> <p>Work Readiness Programs</p> <p>Family Reunification Programs</p>
Specific Examples	<p>Inmate Development and Pre-Release (IDPR) Courses (UK)</p> <p>Community Integration Program (CIP) (Victoria, Australia)</p>

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### Temporary Leave/Work Release

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Objective	To develop prisoners' job skills and work ethic; facilitate family reunification and/or enable prisoners to secure accommodation and establish financial and other supports prior to release.
Key Features	<p>Generally used as a means of transitional preparation for prisoners who have served a specified component of their sentence.</p> <p>Leave duration and frequency highly variable.</p> <p>May be used in conjunction with a range of other transitional support interventions for example, pre-release preparation programs and statutorily supervised step out programs.</p> <p>Program parameters are typically prescribed in legislation and program intake is determined administratively.</p>
Service Sub-Types	<p>Work Release</p> <p>Study/Training Leave</p> <p>Reintegration Leave</p>
Specific Examples	<p>Work and Development Program (WA, Australia)</p> <p>Work Project (Canada)</p> <p>Washington Work Release Program (USA)</p>

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### Release with Residential Supervision

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Objective	To provide prisoners approaching the end of their sentence with a residentially structured and supervised step out program.
Key Features	<p>Programs offer increasing prisoner autonomy and gradual withdrawal of statutory supervision requirements.</p> <p>Generally used as an alternative to continued imprisonment or as a special condition of parole for prisoners whose application would otherwise be denied.</p> <p>Accommodation is typically in free-standing, non-secure buildings in the community.</p>

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	Residents regularly depart to attend work, training and community programs.
	Service capacity often considered part of the jurisdiction's total prison stock.
	May be operated by government, private and community-based organisations.
	Breach of program conditions generally results in a return to prison.
Service Sub-Types	Pre-Release Centres Work Release Centres Residential Treatment Programs Independent Living Houses
Specific Examples	Spring Hill Resettlement Unit (UK) St Vincent's Community Corrections Centre (QLD, Australia)

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#### Release with Community-Based Supervision

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Objective	To provide prisoners approaching the end of their sentence with a community supervised and supported alternative to on-going imprisonment.
Key Features	<p>Programs offer increasing prisoner autonomy and gradual withdrawal of statutory supervision requirements.</p> <p>May be used as an alternative to continued imprisonment or as a special condition of parole for prisoners whose application would otherwise be denied.</p> <p>Supervision may involve multiple weekly contacts, collateral contacts and/or some form of electronic monitoring.</p> <p>The balance between supervision and support is variable, though both elements should be present.</p> <p>Entry decision-making is generally semi-judicial.</p> <p>Breach of program conditions generally results in a return to prison.</p>

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Service Sub-Types	Parole Release to Home Detention Release with Electronic and/or Drug and Alcohol Monitoring. Release to a Community Sponsor/Mentor
Specific Examples	Release on Home Detention (QLD, Australia) New Jersey IPS (USA)

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### Bridging (Post-Release) Support Services

Traditionally known as *post-release services*, these programs are referred to here as *bridging services* to reflect the reality that many commence in custody and carry through to the post-release phase.

Bridging support services are the primary form of post-release assistance to prisoners released directly to the community and in most cases, to those released on parole. They are most commonly provided by the not-for-profit community sector, though government and private enterprise may also be involved in direct service delivery. A clear distinction is generally drawn between the reintegration support offered by post-release services and the statutory supervision provided as a condition of release.

Bridging support services traditionally comprise housing, employment, personal support and integrated case management. Each of these elements is described separately, though in practice they are often delivered via a mixed service model.

#### Bridging Support: Integrated Case Management

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Objective	To provide intensive support and case co-ordination to prisoners with multiple and/or complex needs.
Key Features	<p>Contact begins in well in advance of exit and continues throughout the immediate post-release period, diminishing in intensity over time.</p> <p>Intervention takes place in the context of a case management framework incorporating a pre-release plan, relapse response plan, and medium term integration strategies aimed at developing pro-social relationships and activities.</p> <p>Provision of individualised support to address substance abuse, housing, financial and employment issues.</p> <p>Ideally delivered by community based agencies; specialist support may be provided directly by the agency or brokered via inter-agency partnerships.</p>

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	Service offers after hours crisis support, at least in immediate post-release phase.
Some Service Sub-Types	'One- Stop' Prisoner Support Centres Partnership Based Case Management
Specific Examples	Bridging the Gap (Victoria, Australia)

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### Bridging Support: Housing

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Objective	To secure prisoner housing prior to release; to maintain housing post-release.
Key Features	<p>Services generally extend back into the prison environment in an effort to ensure that appropriate accommodation is secured prior to the prisoner's release.</p> <p>Often provided by community-based housing specialists though specially trained prison staff may play a role.</p> <p>Housing assessment provided to all prisoners on reception and immediate action taken to maintain current accommodation for short term prisoners and negotiate lease termination/storage arrangements for longer term prisoners.</p> <p>Pre-release housing plan developed and implemented to secure accommodation prior to release.</p> <p>Post-release support provided to maintain housing/respond to housing crises.</p> <p>A range of bridging housing support service types exist, each with distinct features.</p>
Service Sub-Types	Housing Information, Referral and/or Brokerage Transitional Accommodation Skill Development
Specific Examples	Buckley Hall Prison Housing Advice Centre (UK) NACRO Prisons Link Unit (UK) NACRO Supported Lodgings Scheme (UK) SWEP Housing Program (Melbourne, Australia)

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**Bridging Support: Employment**


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Objective	To improve job-readiness and secure prisoner employment prior to release; to maintain employment post-release.
Key Features	<p>Services generally extend back into the prison environment in an effort to ensure that job readiness issues are addressed well in advance of release.</p> <p>Often provided by community-based employment and training specialists though may be linked to prison training programs.</p> <p>Pre-release employment plan developed and implemented to secure employment prior to release.</p> <p>Post-release support provided to maintain employment and respond to changes in the employment situation as they arise.</p> <p>Programs are often targeted to meet the specific needs of age, gender or ethnic sub-populations.</p> <p>A range of employment support service types exist, each with distinct features.</p>
Service Sub-Types	<p>Vocational Advice and Guidance</p> <p>Job Search and Placement</p> <p>Job Creation</p> <p>Employer Support</p>
Specific Service Examples	<p>Keyskills Project (UK)</p> <p>Equal Access to Employment (UK)</p> <p>Project Re-Enterprise (US)</p> <p>Koori Transition Project (Victoria, Australia)</p>

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**Bridging: Personal Support**


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Objective	To provide emotional and/or psychological support to address the social isolation and low self-esteem frequently experienced by people on release from prison.
Key Features	<p>Services generally provided by community-based agencies, often with the support of volunteers.</p> <p>May extend back into the prison environment in order to establish a relationship prior to release.</p> <p>Services offer a source of community connection and over time, assist in developing broader social ties.</p> <p>Often involves reunification support with prisoners' family and friends.</p> <p>May incorporate forms of practical assistance and/or serve as a platform for more targeted, problem-specific interventions.</p>
Service Sub-Types	<p>Professional Support</p> <p>Peer Support</p> <p>Community Mentors/Sponsors</p>
Specific Service Examples	<p>Safer Foundation Support Services (USA)</p> <p>UNLOCK Prisoner Support (UK)</p>

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**Recommendations:**

10. That the proposed transitional support service framework be subject to consultation with Victorian transitional support service providers and prison operators.
11. That the framework be modified and adopted as a basis for funding, developing and evaluating Victorian transitional support services.
12. That the OCSC examine the role and location of transitional drug treatment and support services within the context of the Victorian Prison's Drug Strategy.

## 8. Service Development Priorities

Given that the transitional support system is under-developed in Victoria and that the external knowledge base regarding optimum service design is limited, a series of well evaluated pilots will provide a foundation for future service expansion. This does not, however, substitute the need for core, recurrent funding of the transitional support *function* as a reflection of the correctional system's obligations to facilitate successful movement from custody to community.

The prioritisation of service development options must be cognisant of the recent investment in intensive case management pilots (Bridging the Gap) and release with residential supervision (three transitional support units).

Both practicality and program design suggest that neither of the newly funded initiatives are geared to meet the needs of short term prisoners. However, given that 31% of Victorian prisoners are discharged after less than three months and 61% are discharged after less than six months, it is important to trial transitional support responses that are suitable for short term prisoners. This imperative has driven the prioritisation of new initiatives described below.

It must be noted however, that the short sentence population is notoriously hard to reach and that there is little in the literature to inform service design. All efforts must be subject to on-going review and modification as required.

### 8.1 New Initiatives

Three new service developments are proposed here. The first is a pre-release information kit designed as a universal platform for all other pre-release preparation initiatives. The second is a specialist housing program that capitalises on current collaboration between the OCSC and the Office of Housing, under the auspices of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy. The third is a community-based reintegration program specifically targeting shorter term prisoners who comprise the majority of sentenced discharges from Victorian prisons.

An overview of these three initiatives is provided below.

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**Pre Release Preparation: Information Kit**


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Purpose	To provide a minimum information and support package to all prisoners prior to discharge.
Rationale	<p>Research consistently indicates a low level of prisoner awareness of the support services available on release. Anecdotal evidence suggests that current pre-release preparation is variable throughout the system. A minimum standard should be assured as a universal platform for more targeted pre- and post-release support interventions.</p> <p>A basic information kit is useful means of ensuring that even very short term prisoners receive some pre-release advice.</p>
Target	All sentenced prisoners discharged from Victorian prisons regardless of length of stay, assessed risk or discharge location.
Key Features	<p>Package design based on consultation with prisoners and ex-offender groups.</p> <p>Minimum requirements include information regarding income support, accommodation, employment, social isolation and substance abuse support services; copies of key application forms and tailored instructions.</p> <p>Utilisation of a range of media to reflect the different learning styles and literacy levels of prisoners.</p> <p>Package to be supported by additional face to face program delivery. This should be a targeted component, designed to address the support needs of particular prisoner sub-groups.</p>
Entry	All prisoners would receive the pre-release support package at a pre-determined point prior to release. The package may be provided to short-term prisoners on reception.

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**Bridging Support: Housing**


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Purpose	To provide specialist housing advice, support and brokerage service to prisoners at entry and towards the end of their sentence.
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Rationale	<p>As the role of statutory intervention becomes more focused on addressing criminogenic needs, there is potential to enhance the role of community based services within prisons. Housing remains a discrete service area where specialist expertise and networks are of significant value.</p> <p>A trial housing advice and support program may provide the opportunity to test whether housing needs are best managed by specialists or within a broader case management framework.</p>
Target	<p>Prisoners most at risk of experiencing housing problems on release including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people who have insecure accommodation or are homeless on reception</li> <li>• public housing tenants</li> <li>• people with significant substance abuse or mental health problems</li> <li>• people without adequate social and family support networks</li> </ul>
Key Features	<p>Housing advice and support service established within a metropolitan prison by an existing community-based supported accommodation broker/provider.</p> <p>Service components include crisis intervention early in the sentence to maintain current housing, negotiate reduced public housing rent and/or organise storage of possessions.</p> <p>The range of pre- and post release support functions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct placement in temporary supported accommodation that is part of the provider's broader network</li> <li>• maintenance of a data base of private rental options</li> <li>• assistance with public and private rental applications, provision of references and limited role as rental guarantor.</li> <li>• financial support with bond and rent in advance</li> <li>• skills development for establishing and maintaining housing, with a specific emphasis on chaotic lifestyles</li> <li>• post -release support in the event of a breakdown in housing arrangements.</li> </ul> <p>Service may collect data and serve as a reference point for broader, cross-departmental/governmental housing reform to address long-standing issues of prisoner priority and access.</p>
Entry	<p>All prisoners to undergo a housing needs identification performed by sentence management staff on entry to the system. Referral of those with urgent housing issues to the specialist housing support service. Towards the end of their sentence, prisoners could access the prison-based housing service directly or be referred by prison staff as part of the exit planning process.</p>

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**Temporary Leave: Reintegration Program**


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Purpose	To provide prisoners serving shorter sentences with the option of completing a community based re-entry program for the last few weeks of their sentence.
Rationale	There is some evidence that pre-release preparation programs are best delivered in community based settings where prisoners have the opportunity to test new skills and experience a more gradual de-escalation of external controls. This option may extend some of the programmatic benefits of the pre-release centre model to a wider target group as it is not contingent upon commitment of capital resources.
Target	Prisoners serving short to medium term sentences assessed as at risk of experiencing reintegration difficulties.
Key Features	<p>Participants live in accommodation attached to the program, community based housing and/or their own accommodation.</p> <p>Participants attend a structured reintegration day program that emphasises life skills, financial management, housing support and work readiness.</p> <p>Service delivered by a community based, non-government service provider.</p> <p>Program may be linked to an intensive case management service with participation in both program components a mandatory requirement.</p>
Entry	Entry via generic risk assessment tool developed as part of the Victorian case management framework with input from service operators.

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## 8.2 Service Re-development

In addition to these new initiatives, redevelopment of two current programs is proposed.

Firstly, the Community Integration Program (CIP) should be re-shaped as a targeted intervention to complement the pre-release information kit received by all prisoners. This recognises that many prisoners require more intensive, face-to face support in preparing for release. Though current delivery of CIP is variable across the system, the program has been well regarded in the past and provides a useful framework for on-going activity.

Consideration should be given to developing modules that cater to specific prisoner sub-groups based on age, cultural background and life circumstance. It may also be beneficial to develop formal alliances with external agencies that participate in program delivery to enhance the consistency, quality and relevance of information and support provided. Consideration should be given to offering modules on weekends and evenings as well as during the working day to maximise program participation. Responsibility for delivering aspects of the program could be contracted to community based transitional support providers to enable them to engage with prisoners as a basis for on-going intervention.

Secondly, the temporary leave program should be reviewed and appropriate elements reconfigured as a discrete transitional support mechanism. At present, temporary leave comprises a range of different leave types all with different functions. It is the *mechanism* of leave that defines the program, rather than any overarching purpose. For example, leave permits are currently issued to enable prisoners to participate in programs not available within the prison, to perform work and community service and to facilitate community integration.

As a minimum, it would be useful to separate those functions that contribute to the prisoners' structured day from those that aim to enhance the transition from custody to community. The latter should be re-shaped as a discrete program and accessed in the context of an exit plan to enable the prisoner to test new skills and/or establish necessary supports and linkages prior to release. It may be that integration leave is redesigned purely as an adjunct to other forms of bridging support such as intensive case management or specialist housing support, to assist in achieving specific goals established within these programs.

Re-development of the temporary leave program must address the eligibility criteria that currently exclude most prisoners from any form of reintegration leave.

### **8.3 Responding to Particular Sub-Groups.....**

While this paper does not aim to address the specific transitional support needs of all prisoner sub-groups, it is worth highlighting the situation of a two populations whose transitional support needs are neither well understood nor even well recognised at present. Significant work is required to develop appropriate service responses for these groups.

#### **Remandees**

To this point, the current analysis has focussed exclusively on the sentenced prison population. However, in addition to the 3,650 sentenced prisoners discharged from Victorian prisons in 1999/00, a further 970 people were discharged from remand. The literature regarding transitional support services for remandees is virtually non-existent, yet theoretically at least, many individuals face family upheaval, disruption of accommodation, employment and/or income support arrangements as well as the risks associated with reduced tolerance to drugs.

Remandees pose a unique set of challenges because of their legal status, length of stay and typically circuitous route from police custody to correctional custody. Nevertheless, they comprise a substantial sub-population whose transitional support requirements cannot be over-looked. The OCSC should convene a group of remand providers as a first step in scoping preferred transitional support responses for this group.

### Aboriginal Prisoners

Recognition of the unique needs of Aboriginal prisoners in custody has prompted major system reform at both the federal and state levels. Despite this, there is a significant gap in transitional support services for Koori prisoners. This has been highlighted by recent funding of Bridging the Gap services that, despite a highly targeted approach, failed to identify indigenous prisoners as a priority sub-group.

The Koori Transition Project (KTP) at Loddon Prison is one example of a targeted employment and training program aimed at facilitating a successful transition from custody to community. Recent review of this program (Cowie, 2000) noted that while the need for culturally specific services for Aboriginal people had been accepted in principle, there were virtually no support services to which people could be referred on release from prison. The report was particularly critical of the ability of mainstream statutory and non-statutory services to respond appropriately to the transitional needs of indigenous prisoners.

The OCSC should commence dialogue with Aboriginal service providers to develop an appropriate transitional support pilot for Koori prisoners. Extension of the KTP model to address a broader range of support needs and provide formal post-release assistance could prove a useful foundation for further activity.

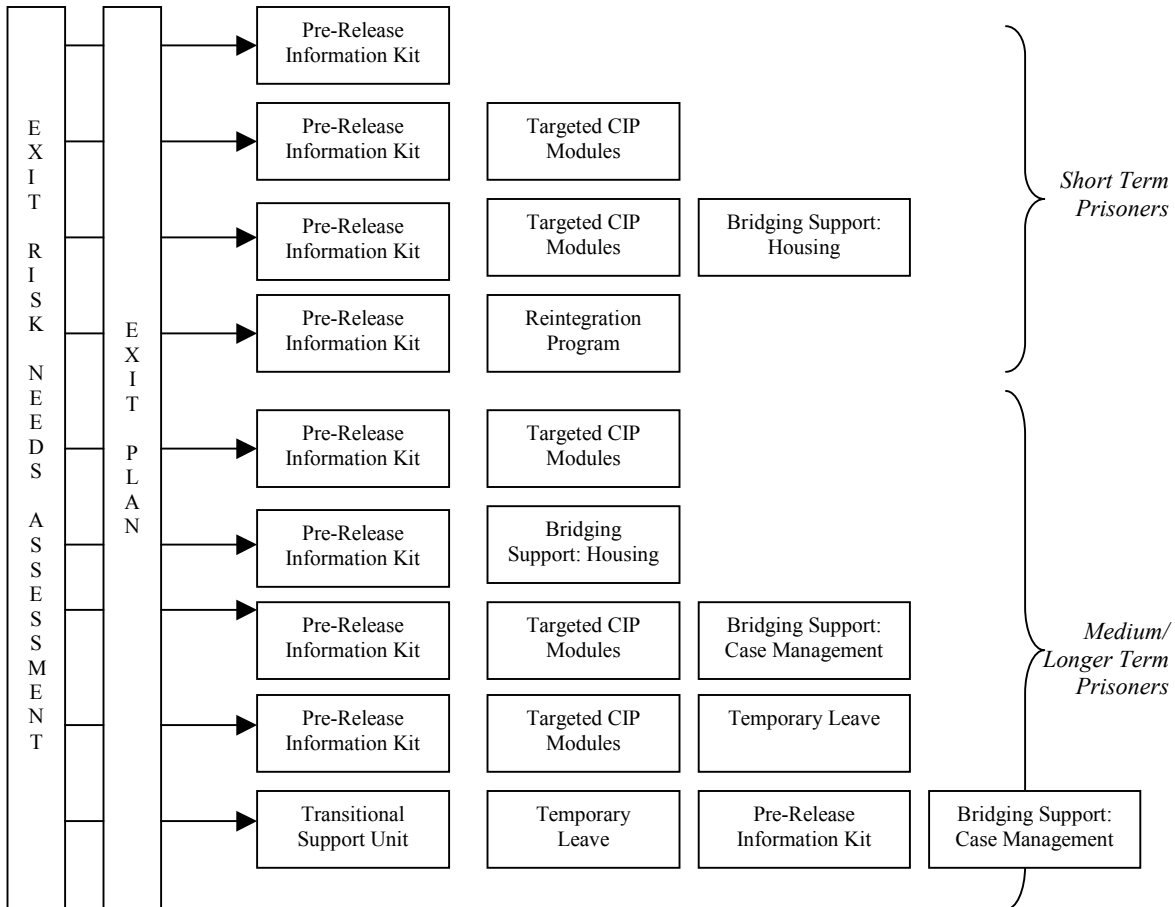
## 8.4 Overview of Exit Pathways

Approximately 3,500 sentenced prisoners were discharged from Victorian prisons in the last financial year. While many required some information and/or advice regarding community based services, not all required active transitional support. The challenge, at this early stage of system development is to identify the level of transitional support required overall and quantify the amount of each service type required to ensure an appropriate match between Victorian prisoner characteristics and new program design.

The issue of program fit is particularly critical in the Victorian context where the total use of imprisonment is lower than the UK, US and most other Australian jurisdictions. This may imply that the pool of lower risk offenders available for alternative forms of statutory supervision in Victorian prisons is smaller than elsewhere. It may also imply that the proportion of the total prison population requiring intensive transitional support is higher than elsewhere.

The combination of service development priorities proposed in this paper establishes a range of possible exit pathways that reflect the different needs - and sentence lengths - of Victorian prisoners. Note that all pathways assume provision of minimum pre-release information. Service elements such as housing support may be accessed directly by short term prisoners or attached to alternative forms of statutory supervision for longer term prisoners.

Some possible exit pathways include:



### 8.5 Implementation Pre Requisites

The ability to achieve good transitional planning and support is impacted by a wide range of factors in the broader correctional system including the number and frequency of prisoner movements - particularly in the last part of the sentence - the proximity of the exit prison to the prisoners' home area, the availability of predictable exit dates and even more straightforward matters such as storage of prisoner belongings while in custody.

Any new investment in transitional support services cannot be fully realised until these issues are identified and addressed systematically, within broader operational constraints.

The Bridging the Gap pilots provide an opportunity to identify and address internal barriers to achieving good transitional support outcomes.

Similarly, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities for the provision of transitional support across the correctional system. The relationship between transitional support services and parole warrants particular scrutiny. It is important to consider whether the rehabilitative and regulatory functions of transitional support services should be provided from two different sources and if so, what this means for case management processes, inter-agency co-ordination and the location of accountability for achieving program objectives.

Finally, there is a need to link the development of transitional support services with other elements of the current reform agenda. Internal business planning processes should ensure that the implications of an enhanced commitment to transitional support are identified for other corrections initiatives including the Community Corrections Review and the master planning of prison capital.

Recommendations:

13. That the OCSC develop and implement a pre-release information kit as a universal platform for all other pre-release preparation initiatives.
14. That the OCSC redevelop the Community Integration Program as a targeted adjunct to the universal pre-release information kit.
15. That the OCSC redevelop elements of the temporary leave program as a transitional support mechanism.
16. That the OCSC support the trial delivery of a specialist housing, support and brokerage program within Victorian prisons.
17. That the OCSC support the trial delivery of a community reintegration program for short term prisoners.
18. That the OCSC investigate models of transitional support for people exiting remand.
19. That the OCSC investigate models of transitional support for Aboriginal prisoners exiting prison.

20. That the OCSC articulate the relationship between transitional support services and parole.
21. That the OCSC draw on the experience of the Bridging the Gap pilots to formally identify and address current prison practices that undermine good transitional outcomes.

## 9. Summary

The Victorian transitional support system is extremely under developed at present. Unfortunately, so is the broader evidence base regarding service efficacy. However, the literature offers some insight into achievable goals, important design features and the range of service types that should comprise a transitional support system for people leaving prison.

If this insight is matched with analysis of the characteristics of the Victorian prison population and tested by experienced local service providers, a useful set of assumptions can be derived to guide the development of new services.

Of course, any change requires formal acknowledgment that the provision of transitional support services to people exiting custody is a core function of the correctional system.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Current System Operation

1. That the OCSC audit prison operator performance with respect to the provision of pre-release preparation programs to quantify current service levels and identify examples of good practice.
2. That the OCSC analyse the current application of temporary leave as a transitional support measure.
3. That the OCSC map existing provision of transitional support services with a particular emphasis on housing and other supports funded from non-Department of Justice sources.
4. That the OCSC facilitate the establishment of a network of current transitional support service providers to enhance co-ordination of current activities and promote sector development.

### Making a Commitment to Transitional Support

5. That the OCSC seek amendments to the *Corrections Act (1986)* to reflect the Department of Justice's obligation to provide transitional support for all people exiting prison.
6. That the OCSC make a formal policy commitment to the provision of transitional support to all people exiting prison.
7. That the OCSC enhance the expectations regarding transitional support contained within the *Correctional Management and Policy Standards for Prisons (1995)*. These should cover as a minimum, exit planning, pre-release preparation and procedures for managing the actual exit process.
8. That the OCSC develop mechanisms to ensure routine monitoring of prison operator performance with respect to the provision of transitional support.
9. That the OCSC enhance *exit* risk/needs assessment and planning requirements within the context of the broader corrections case management framework.

### Developing a Service Framework

10. That the proposed transitional support service framework be subject to consultation with Victorian transitional support service providers and prison operators.
11. That the framework be modified and adopted as a basis for funding, developing and evaluating Victorian transitional support services.

12. That the OCSC examine the role and location of transitional drug treatment and support services within the context of the Victorian Prisons Drug Strategy.

### **Service Development Priorities**

13. That the OCSC develop and implement a pre-release information kit as a universal platform for all other pre-release preparation initiatives.
14. That the OCSC redevelop the Community Integration Program as a targeted adjunct to the universal pre-release information kit.
15. That the OCSC redevelop elements of the temporary leave program as a transitional support mechanism.
16. That the OCSC support the trial delivery of a specialist housing, support and brokerage program within Victorian prisons.
17. That the OCSC support the trial delivery of a community reintegration program for short term prisoners.
18. That the OCSC investigate models of transitional support for people exiting remand.
19. That the OCSC investigate models of transitional support for Aboriginal prisoners exiting prison.
20. That the OCSC articulate the relationship between transitional support services and parole.
21. That the OCSC draw on the experience of the Bridging the Gap pilots to formally identify and address current prison practices that undermine good transitional outcomes.

## Appendix One

## Victorian Transitional Support Services

## Proposed Design Principles

**System Design Principles**

- The transitional support system should be conceptualised broadly to incorporate alternative forms of statutory supervision that involve de-escalating external controls as well as the more traditional support services provided at the point of exit from custody.
- Community reintegration should be an on-going process rather than an event reserved for prisoners who are about to be released. It should underpin case management mechanisms and remain the primary focus of all other activity within the prison.
- The transitional support system should maximise community involvement.
- The transitional support system should target those at highest risk/need on release.
- The transitional support system should be supported by clear entry pathways.
- The transitional support system should meet the distinct needs of prisoner sub-groups.
- A minimum pre-release information package should be available to all prisoners as a universal platform for more targeted transitional support services.
- The transitional support system should be designed to bridge the structural and organisational divide between prisons, community based corrections and community based services.
- The development of transitional support services should be accompanied by a broad communication strategy that places risk within context.

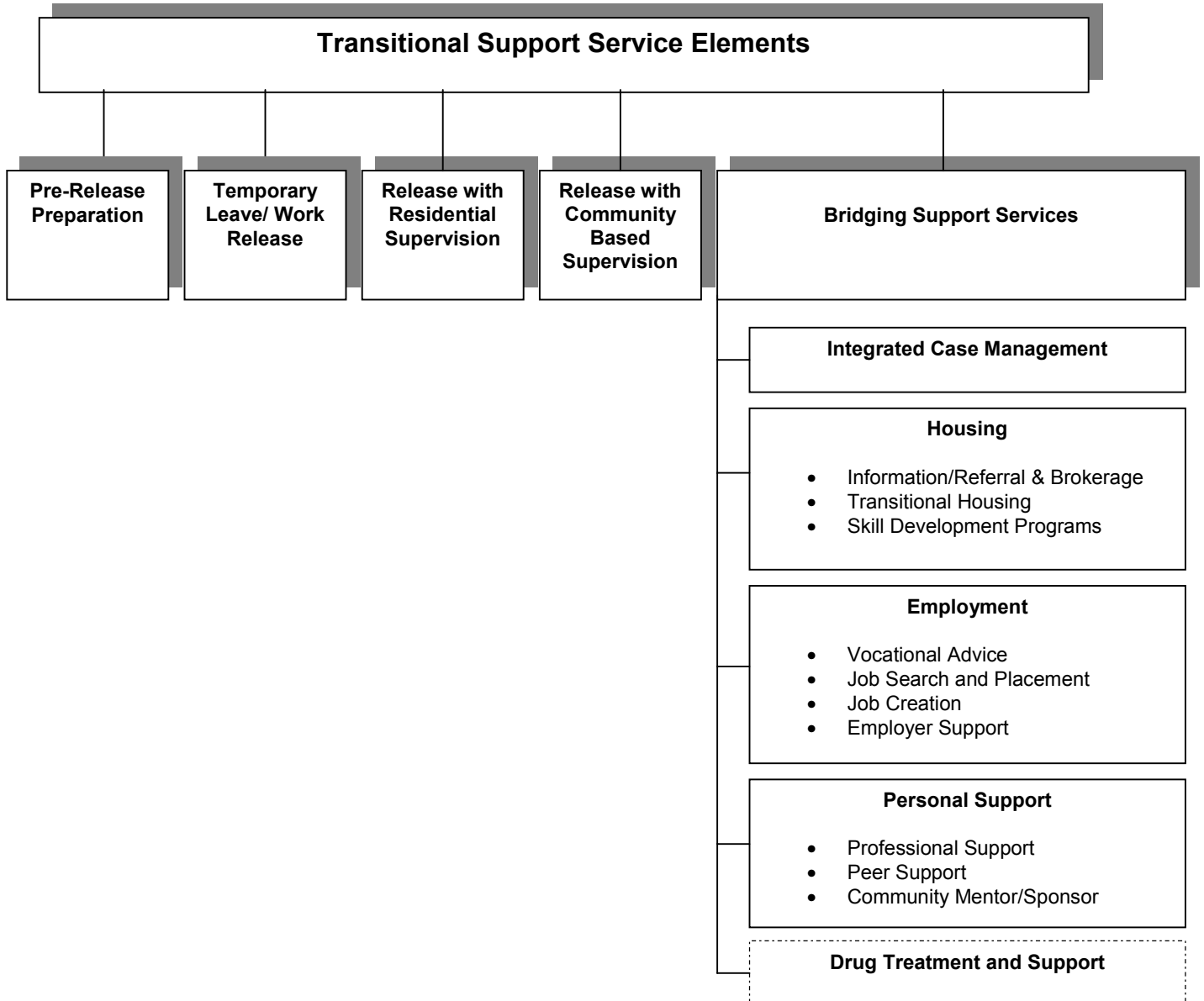
**Service Design Principles**

- Service delivery should begin in custody, continue throughout the immediate release period and diminish in intensity over time.
- Services should be based on relapse prevention principles.
- Services should focus on employment, accommodation and community linkages as key protective factors in prisoner transition.
- Services should facilitate continuity of significant prisoner/worker relationships.
- Services should emphasise support and treatment over surveillance.

Appendix Two

Victorian Transitional Support Services

Service Elements



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