

Box 1: Evaluation principles

- Evaluations are aligned to the overarching CV evaluation framework for correctional programs.
- Decisions about whether to invest in an outcome evaluation are influenced by:
 - » the significance of the program— high risk prisoners, high impact offending and impact on community safety are all high priority areas for evaluation
 - » the evaluability of the program
 - » requirements or obligations to evaluate.
- Evaluation processes are transparent, evaluators possess the necessary expertise and evaluations are conducted by someone independent of the program or policy under review.
- Evaluations must comply with all relevant ethical standards.
- A key focus of evaluations is on understanding the characteristics of effective programs and for which prisoners or offenders programs are most effective. This information will be used to enhance the program design for future program provision.
- Meaningful data on programs and prisoner and offender participation in these programs are routinely collected, recorded and available to evaluators.
- Mechanisms are in place to monitor key program indicators on a regular basis—ensuring both performance and data availability can be routinely assessed.
- The impact of correctional programs on short-term and medium-term outcomes are monitored as well as longer term outcomes. Where possible, evaluations will analyse the extent to which any program impact is maintained over time.
- New programs are subject to an appropriately timed process evaluation to assess implementation fidelity and consistency with best practice in design and delivery.
- Outcome evaluations will reflect a research design that achieves level three on the Scientific Methods Scale (Farrington et al. 2006; MacKenzie 2006; Sherman et al. 1998), with measures of the outcome pre and post intervention and an appropriate comparison group against which to compare results (a quasi-experimental design).
- Evaluations of the impact of correctional programs on reoffending will include estimates of the time to, frequency and seriousness of reoffending, in addition to prevalence estimates (ie return to prison).
- In addition to intervention effects, programs will be evaluated in terms of efficiency and return on investment.

Improving the evidence base

By applying these principles to our key evaluation projects, CV will be able to significantly improve its understanding of program outcomes, including economic impact, and the characteristics of effective programs and prisoners for whom programs are most effective. CV is confident that improving the quality of the evaluation of its correctional programs will strengthen accountability and increase the department's ability to demonstrate a return on the government's investment in programs for prisoners and offenders.

For further information about the CV evaluation framework contact Helen Casey at Helen.Casey@justice.vic.gov.au

Information Management and Evaluation Branch, Strategic Policy and Planning, Corrections Victoria, December 2014.

Corrections Victoria Evaluation Framework 2015 - 2018

Purpose

Corrections Victoria acknowledges the importance of ensuring that programs for prisoners and offenders are well designed, efficiently implemented and effective in reducing recidivism. The key purpose of the Corrections Victoria Evaluation Framework 2015-2018 is to facilitate timely, high quality program evaluations to provide a reliable, robust evidence base for decision making by government about future investment in correctional programs.

A new framework to guide evaluation of correctional programs

CV engaged the Australian Institute of Criminology during 2014 to assist in developing a new evaluation framework to ensure rigorous and systematic evaluation of correctional programs in Victoria.

The evaluation framework outlines the principles that will guide our future evaluation activity. It identifies the outcomes most relevant to evaluations of our key program areas. These outcomes are:

- addressing dynamic risk factors to reduce reoffending
- targeting programs at high-risk, high impact offending to protect community safety
- improving the safety of staff and prisoners by minimising incidents and maintaining good order in prisons
- using best practice to manage parolees and offenders on community orders
- supporting the successful transition of prisoners back into the community to reduce the impact of prisoner reoffending on community safety
- reducing the costs associated with the correctional system and the economic impact of reoffending
- increasing community confidence in the correctional system.

Understanding how and how much our programs work

The start point of evaluation activity is a clear understanding of the theory of change underpinning the design of each program. The overarching program logic that guides CV programs for prisoners is set out in the Program Logic Diagram. This diagram depicts the:

- inputs that are required for the delivery of prison programs
- activities and outputs delivered as part of prison programs
- hierarchy of short, medium and longer-term outcomes that may be attributed to prison programs
- external factors that influence the delivery and effectiveness of prisoners, prison systems and communities.

In addition to this logic model, a detailed research design to guide evaluation activity for each program area is being developed. The research design will be customised to reflect the requirements and characteristics of each individual program. These designs are informed by the overarching evaluation principles set out in Box 1. They outline the specific evaluation questions relating to each component of the program logic model, particularly outputs and outcomes, and also include appropriate performance indicators, including economic indicators, and relevant data sources and data collection methods.

Timeframe

Over the four year period from 2015 to 2018, CV will conduct high quality, robust evaluations of its core programs for prisoners and offenders. The priority areas are programs for violent or sex offenders, parolees, prison education programs, prison industry programs and programs to assist prisoners to reintegrate into the community after release.

The CV evaluation framework outlines the standards for future program evaluation designs and methods. These standards are expressed as principles, which are set out in Box 1.

Corrections Victoria Evaluation Framework 2015 - 2018: Program Logic Model

Problem specification

Prisoner-level

Prisoners have multiple and complex needs that influence the likelihood of reoffending and successful reintegration into the community. These include absence of stable housing, low levels of education and skill training and poor social, coping and cognitive skills.

Systems-level

The government and community have expectations that Corrections Victoria will incapacitate and rehabilitate offenders. Imprisonment has the potential to escalate rather than de-escalate offending behaviours if appropriate and effective interventions are not provided. There are significant costs associated with reoffending. Humane and effective custodial management of prisoners involves the provision of effective and appropriate rehabilitation programs and activities.

Inputs

- Holistic and integrated program development and design
- Legislation and practice guidelines
- Operational and therapeutic staff involved in the delivery and management of programs
- Prisoners and participating prisons
- Funding for programs and related prison infrastructure

Activities

- Risk assessment, programmatic need assessment
- Referral processes
- Individual offender management planning and case management support
- Treatment plans, strategies and interventions are delivered
- Exit planning and post-release support

Outputs

- Eligible and consenting prisoners are identified for participation interventions
- Individualised intervention plans are developed
- Prisoners' participate in an average of 30 hours of meaningful activities per week in programs and/or education and training and/or industries and/or employment
- Prisoners complete programs
- Individualised exit plans are developed and prisoners are provided with support post-release

Short-term

- Prisoners' days are filled with meaningful and structured activities
- Risk factors associated with reoffending decrease prior to release (knowledge, skills, behaviour and motivations)
- Prisoners are supported to transition from prison into the community
- Prisoners' motivation and capacity to access community-based service providers post-release increases

Outcomes

- Number of prison incidents decreases and good order is maintained
- Risk factors associated with reoffending decrease post-release (behaviour and conditions)
- Enhanced family / community connectedness
- Prisoners are more likely to engage with community-based service providers
- Improved prisoner outcomes (eg. receive and comply with parole conditions, security ratings)
- Reduction in risk factors associated with reoffending is maintained
- Prisoners' engagement with community-based service providers is maintained

Long-term

- The safety of prisoners and prison staff improves
- Reduction in frequency and severity of reoffending post-release
- Community safety increases
- Savings associated with reduced prison operating cost and improved prisoner outcomes
- Community confidence in the prison system improves

Guiding service delivery principles

1. Sustainable, efficient and effective service delivery
2. Performance monitoring and evaluation
3. Targeted cohorts
4. Targeted, holistic and flexible program intervention
5. Quality case management
6. Equitable and accessible services
7. Outcome focused

External influences: Attitudes of employers, landlords and the community towards prisoners. Availability of social housing and community-based support services. Other risk factors for future offending (that are outside the influence of Corrections Victoria), participation in other prison programs (not in scope) and the impact of these programs. Factors affecting the Australian economy. Other programs delivered by criminal justice and human services agencies that impact on crime and safety.