

GETTING STARTED HEALTH

Everyone in prison should use the Health Service regularly. Health services are not just for sick people. Looking after your health is important no matter what age you are.

While you are in prison start looking into your health needs. You can find out what you need to do and what you need to know to stay healthy.

When leaving prison it is important to have a health discharge plan. Make an appointment with the Prison Health Service 3 weeks before you leave. Ask them for information and referrals to community health services.

The Prison Health Service cannot give information about you to anyone unless you give them signed permission.

Health Discharge Planning

At this appointment they will help with organising the following:

- Medication for release
- A copy of your Health Discharge Summary
- Referrals to a Doctor, Chemist or clinic in the community
- Subsidised OSTP for the first 4 weeks

OSTP includes methadone and buprenorphine

The Health Discharge Summary may be useful for:

- Community work requirements: ask if you are eligible for light duties
- Centrelink: it could affect your Centrelink obligations or assist with a Disability Support Pension application
- Getting the right medication: some doctors won't prescribe the drugs you need without background information

Accessing Medical Services

For medical services outside prison you will need a Medicare Card (see **Getting Started 3: Identification**). If you have a Health Care Card (see **Getting Started 5: Centrelink**) you will be able to access free medical and dental treatment. A Health Care Card will also give you cheaper prescription medication.

You should try to use one general practice clinic and build a good relationship with your GP. This will improve the service you get.

If you don't have time to get a health discharge summary before you leave, ask your GP to call **Justice Health on (03) 9947 1601**. They can get the information if you sign a release form.

Looking After Your Health

To be healthy you need to look after your physical and mental health.

Physical Health

To become healthier you should exercise regularly and eat well. Eating well means having a balanced diet. Don't eat too much. Eat a lot of fresh vegetables and fruit and eat less animal products (like meat or dairy). Also avoid processed food and food with added sugar or salt. Take away food can taste great but it will cost more and won't be healthy.

If you are unsure about how to cook for yourself there are people that can help. Many community health centres have dieticians or nutritionists that can give you advice. Your local neighbourhood house may have cooking classes or you can learn how to cook from the internet.

If you have a chronic medical condition (like Hep C, arthritis or asthma) then you will feel a lot better with a good health plan. The health service can provide useful advice and information about what will work for you.

Pre-release anxiety

You may get a bit of "gate fever" as you get near release. Pre-release anxiety is the rising anticipation or excitement about getting out. This could include a fear that something will go wrong and prevent your release. You may also have doubts about how well you are going to cope once you are out.

What can you do?

Accept that these feelings are normal. Try to stay calm and prepare yourself for release. If possible, talk to someone about it.



Getting Out

Once you get out you may feel strange, particularly if you have had a long sentence. You may feel that you stand out. It is unlikely that anyone can tell you have just got out of prison.

Remember that it is normal for people to look at each other. It doesn't mean they know you or are judging you. If you think someone is looking at you funny don't take it personally and don't react. It probably has nothing to do with you.

Decision-making may seem difficult. After a long time of three square meals and lockdowns even the simple decisions can feel weird. It will get easier with time.

Don't rely on other people to make your decisions. Take advice if it's useful. If you are getting too much advice let people know in the nicest way possible.

If things are difficult once you are released there are lots of options. You can see a counsellor for talking therapy or a GP for medicine. You may also find that you can get over the feelings of depression and anxiety with time. You could find that regular exercise or meditation is enough for you. Work can also be helpful.

Depression and anxiety are closely related. Both are common for all people and frequently experienced by people after they get out.

Signs of Depression:

- No motivation, tiredness or lethargy
- Can't sleep or sleep too much
- Loss of appetite or over eating
- Negative thoughts
- Inability to enjoy yourself
- Thinking about suicide

If any of this is interfering with your life, speak to a health service.

In case of Emergency

Ambulance, fire or police	000
Nurse on Call	1300 60 60 24
Melbourne Sexual Health Clinic	9341 6200
AIDSLine	9347 6133
Hepatitis C of Victoria	9380 4644
QUITline	13 18 48
Medicines Line	1300 633 424
Victorian Poison Information Centre	13 11 26