Launching the *Corrections Victoria Disability Framework* in 2007, the Victorian State Government made a commitment towards tackling the significant issue of offenders with a disability. With rates of re-offending higher for this population than for other offenders, a more customised response was required.

Lodged with the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in August 2007, the three year *Corrections Victoria Disability Framework* encompasses seven themes:

- Ensuring Policy Alignment
- Building the Evidence Base
- Improving Access and Infrastructure
- Enhancing Systems
- Enhancing Skills
- Ensuring System Transparency
- Ensuring Stakeholder Communication and Support

At this midway point in the cycle, 31 per cent of the Framework’s 64 initiatives have already been completed.

A further 55 per cent of the initiatives are on track, meeting time and budget requirements. Only 14 per cent are delayed, which includes finalising a specially fitted prison transport vehicle for wheelchair accessibility. Ongoing initiatives include co-convening the biennial Forensic Disabilities Conference in 2009, and developing the next Disability Framework to take us through to 2013.

This Report Card presents a summary of the progress of the Disability Framework initiatives to December 2008.
Enhancing Systems

Joint Treatment Program

The Joint Treatment Program is a 35-bed facility located at the maximum security Port Phillip Prison. Delivered in partnership with Port Phillip Prison (GSL (Australia) Pty Ltd) and Statewide Forensic Service (Department of Human Services), it provides a 24/7 treatment program, supported by a multi-disciplinary staff team, for male prisoners who have a cognitive impairment.

Launched in December 2007, this innovative program provides a range of adapted treatment groups including violent offender, sex offender, drug and alcohol, anger management, conflict resolution and art therapy. These programs enable prisoners with a cognitive impairment to address their offending behaviour.

With over 120 prisoners undertaking or completing programs so far, the Joint Treatment Program provides continued opportunities for prisoners with a cognitive impairment to turn their lives around, enhancing community safety.

The Joint Treatment Program will continue to be a key component of Corrections Victoria’s ongoing efforts to address re-offending.

Disability Prison Pathway

The second stage of the Disability Prison Pathway has been formalised with the July 2008 launch of a two-year pilot project that will help prisoners with a cognitive impairment to prepare for their future release.

Offering a staged transition, the pilot project supports prisoners with a cognitive impairment to move from the Marlborough Unit, located in the maximum security Port Phillip Prison, to the medium security Loddon Prison, located near Castlemaine in Victoria.

Modelled on the Joint Treatment Program, this project will see the employment of an additional full-time educational trainer, and a part-time clinician to deliver a range of skill development and therapeutic maintenance programs to prepare prisoners with a cognitive impairment for their release from prison.

Disability Pathways Unit

To ensure that correctional services in Victoria are responsive to the differentiated needs of offenders and prisoners with a disability, Corrections Victoria has funded three new staff positions and established a Disability Pathways Unit.

The Disability Pathways Manager, Senior Clinician and Clinician work across the Victorian correctional system, as well as providing support and advice to key stakeholders and community service organisations.

Since 2007, the Disability Prison Pathway Unit has provided a range of programs and services relevant to forensic disability, including assessment, case management advice and advocacy; specialist treatment programs and behavioural advice; training and consultation; and promoted awareness of disability and the issues affecting this population of offenders.
Street Soccer Program

Commencing in December 2007, the Port Phillip Prison Street Soccer Program is offered to male prisoners with a cognitive impairment who reside in the Marlborough Unit, Port Phillip Prison. Run by The Big Issue in Australia Ltd, the program uses weekly soccer training sessions to engage this group of prisoners in team-based physical activity.

Introduction of the Street Soccer program into the Marlborough Unit is a world first for a prison setting.

Up to 20 prisoners take part in the program’s weekly training, which includes two hours of stretching, development of soccer skills, and team exercises.

With opportunities to assist the coach, some prisoners with a cognitive impairment also get to try their hand at leadership and mentoring roles.

As well as the regular weekly training sessions, round robin tournaments are played every three months, enabling players to test their newly-acquired skills against a wide range of competitors.

A key focus of this initiative is its capacity to link prisoners into the Street Soccer community based program. Already one player has joined the program upon his release from prison.

With the success of its first year, the program is set to continue.

“Soccer is great, and it helped me when I first came out [of prison].”

(Male prisoner following his participation in the prison street soccer program, and release from prison)

Adapted Cognitive Skills Program – Community Correctional Services

Recognising that offenders with a cognitive impairment have the right to access and participate in services and programs that are appropriate to their needs, Corrections Victoria piloted the Adapted Cognitive Skills Program in 2008.

Drawing participants from Community Correctional Services in the Northern and Western Metro Regions, the program was delivered to offenders with a cognitive impairment on community-based orders.

Based on the program developed by Professor James McGuire, University of Liverpool, England, and facilitated by two psychologists, the Adapted Cognitive Skills Program is designed to improve the thinking skills of offenders with a cognitive impairment.

A key initiative of the Corrections Victoria Disability Framework, the program is also delivered to prisoners in the Victorian prison system.

With the recent graduation of eight participants from the Community Correctional Services program, another program is being planned for 2009.

Above: Community Correctional Services Cognitive Skills Program.
Disability Portfolio Holders

To improve the responsiveness of both Community Correctional Services and prisons to offenders with a disability, Corrections Victoria has appointed Disability Portfolio Holders across the correctional system.

With 25 appointments across Victorian prisons, and Community Correctional Services, as well as the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, and Extended Supervision Order Temporary Accommodation Centre (ESOTAC), the initiative has expanded to include an appointment at the Adult Parole Board of Victoria.

Commencing in February 2008, and supported by regular network and training meetings, this role will continue to provide staff working in each location with a direct contact point for up-to-date information about disability issues.

International Day of People with Disability

Acknowledging the United Nations-sanctioned International Day of People with Disability, Corrections Victoria is committed to hosting an annual Disability Framework Guest Lecture series.

Launched on 3 December 2007, with a lecture by eminent psychiatrist Dr William Glaser, this series will raise awareness about people with a disability and the problems they experience gaining appropriate access to services in the criminal justice system.

Dr Glaser’s lecture: ‘Thinking Smart for Both Offenders and Systems – The Future of Forensic Disability’: provided some thought-provoking views on the future development of forensic disability systems.

With Ms Colleen Pearce, Public Advocate for Victoria, accepting an invitation to present the second in this series of guest lectures on 3 December 2008, Corrections Victoria will continue to highlight the significant issue of offenders with a disability.

Building the Evidence Base

Research – Male Prisoners with an Intellectual Disability

Published by Corrections Victoria in September 2007, the Intellectual Disability in the Victorian Prison System research paper examined the characteristics of male prisoners with an intellectual disability in the Victorian prison system, comparing them with prisoners who do not have an intellectual disability.

The research findings show that prisoners with an intellectual disability have higher re-offending rates and are often younger at their first reception into prison. Other findings highlight the complexities associated with this group, including higher unemployment rates, lower educational qualifications, and higher rates of youth detention.

Providing a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of this population, the research will continue to inform Corrections Victoria’s response to offenders with an intellectual disability.

The quality of this research has resulted in Corrections Victoria being invited to submit an article based on the findings for publication in the prestigious international journal Psychology, Crime and Law.

Research – Indigenous Prisoners and Hearing Impairment

Commissioned by Corrections Victoria in 2006, and conducted by the University of Melbourne School of Audiology, the Investigation into Hearing Impairment amongst Indigenous Prisoners in the Victorian Correctional System examined the prevalence of hearing impairment in male and female Indigenous prisoners.

The study’s findings show that the population of Victorian Indigenous prisoners has significantly more hearing problems than would be expected in the general Australian adult population. If unable to hear properly, prisoners risk missing important information aimed at helping them to address their offending behaviours.

With the study providing an extensive understanding of the consequences of hearing impairment, Corrections Victoria is introducing a range of responses, including hearing screening for prisoners and training for correctional staff.

The study will continue to inform Corrections Victoria’s response to offenders with a hearing impairment.

Screening Tool Acquired Brain Injury – Pilot

Recognising that a targeted response to prisoners and offenders with a disability relies on specific identification data, Corrections Victoria has piloted a tool to screen for Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) in correctional settings.

The ABI screening pilot involved a three-stage process of identification, consisting of a screening tool, clinical interview and neuropsychological
assessment. With both stage one and two administered by assessment officers and clinical staff, the third stage involved neuropsychological assessment and was administered by qualified neuropsychologists.

Providing robust data, and validating the ABI screening process, the pilot has led to a further full study currently underway within Corrections Victoria.

This study will inform Corrections Victoria’s response to offenders with an ABI.

Assessment Tool – Offenders with an Intellectual Disability

Corrections Victoria disability professionals Peter Persson and Dr Barry Waterman are part of the research team which is currently developing an assessment tool for offenders with an intellectual disability who are subject to imprisonment and other long-term restrictive practices.

Titled the Assessment of Risk and Manageability for Intellectually Disabled Individuals who Offend (ARMIDILo), the tool will assess the support needs of people with an intellectual disability who engage in severe behaviours of concern that constitute a criminal offence.

Led by Dr Keith McVilly, Lecturer in Disability Studies, RMIT; Associate Professor Doug Boer, Department of Psychology, University of Waikato, New Zealand; and Dr Frank Lambrick, Office of the Senior Practitioner, Department of Human Services, the research team was recently awarded a $44,000 grant from the Victorian State Government.

Focussing on male prisoners with an intellectual disability accommodated at Port Phillip Prison, the research is expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

Once validated, the screening tool will be used in the future assessment of prisoners with an intellectual disability.

Ensuring Policy Alignment

Protocol – Corrections Victoria and Disability Services

Launched on 30 July 2008, the Protocol between Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice, and Disability Services, Department of Human Services 2008, represents a significant milestone for both organisations.

Prisoners with a disability present a considerable management and rehabilitation challenge for both the correctional and disability service systems, as well as the wider community, emphasising the need for a continued partnership between Corrections Victoria and Disability Services.

Representing Corrections Victoria’s ongoing commitment to working in close partnership with Disability Services, the protocol includes a quick reference guide and provides the foundation for both services to respond more effectively to offenders who have a disability.

Policies and Procedures – Corrections Victoria

Since launching the Disability Framework in 2007, Corrections Victoria has undertaken a number of steps to ensure the policies and procedures governing practice consider the inclusion of disability.

Through consultation with the Disability Framework policy team, Community Correctional Services staff reviewed all the Director’s Instruction operational procedures, ensuring they are responsive to offenders with a disability.

Making sure the operations of the Joint Treatment Program are responsive to the needs of offenders with a disability, the Disability Framework policy team launched the Marlborough Unit Joint Treatment Program Operating Manual in July 2008.

With capacity to be adapted for medium and minimum security prison locations, this manual provides a blueprint for best practice in a treatment community model.

Left: Protocol between Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice, and Disability Services, Department of Human Services 2008.
Enhancing Skills

Training
Since rolling out the Disability Framework, Corrections Victoria has provided over 400 staff, including prison and Community Corrections Officers, with ongoing training encompassing a range of areas relevant to disability.

Aiming to provide staff with the knowledge and skills to effectively and appropriately work with offenders and prisoners with a disability, training subjects covered include acquired brain injury, hearing impairment, disability awareness, behaviour strategies, vision impairment, and referral processes.

With feedback from staff highlighting the positive ways the training will help them in their interactions with offenders and prisoners with a cognitive impairment, more sessions are planned.

In addition, a regular series of articles in the Corrections Victoria staff newsletter Corrections Weekly helps to educate staff about important disability issues.

“The training was excellent and will definitely help in my future communication with prisoners who have a hearing impairment.”

Barbara Krenz, Grampians Region Prisons, following her participation in hearing impairment training

Further information
Further information about the Disability Framework can be obtained by emailing a request to Corrections Victoria: corrections@justice.vic.gov.au or by visiting the website: www.justice.vic.gov.au

References
Assessment of Risk and Manageability for Intellectually Disabled Individuals who Offend (ARMIDLO). Various papers by Douglas P. Boer, PhD

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