

Evaluation of ACT Extended Throughcare Pilot Program

Summary of findings

This summary report is about the evaluation of the Extended Throughcare Program (the Program) in the ACT. Extended Throughcare is a *voluntary* program that provides community-based support to ex-detainees at the end of their custodial sentence at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC; the ACT's only adult correctional facility). The findings of the evaluation highlight clients' experiences with the Program, the impact of the Program in key areas, the strengths of the Program, and areas for improvement. The study is based on face to face interviews with people who have used Extended Throughcare in the ACT, their families, service providers and ACT Corrections staff. The study also used data to see what impact the Program has had on return to custody (recidivism) and whether the Program has been cost effective.

The main findings are:

- The Program has achieved high uptake rates and has had a positive impact on clients beyond their period in custody. Most clients felt that support coordinated by the Throughcare Unit had met their needs well, with several attributing this to the trust they had developed with Program staff.
- Clients detailed two types of support that they had received through the Program: material and non-material support. Non-material support included advocacy on behalf of the client. For example, many clients had received support from the Program to secure housing upon release or to maintain existing housing. Research shows the importance of appropriate and stable housing for detainees on release.
- In terms of personal wellbeing, clients commonly received mental health counselling, physical health treatments or general assistance with health and wellbeing, coordinated by the Throughcare Unit. The majority of participants had also received some form of drug and alcohol rehabilitation treatment.
- Several clients said that the support had increased their capacity to live independently, usually as a result of assistance with small day to day matters. For some interview participants, their overall quality of life or ability to achieve goals had increased as a result of this support.
- The majority of interview participants felt that the Program had helped to decrease their likelihood of reoffending. Clients attributed this success to material support from the Program, as well as non-material "moral" support and encouragement. This is supported by data which suggests

return to custody episodes for clients reduced by 23% compared to the three-year period before the Program was introduced. Data also indicates that those returning to custody are remaining in the community for longer periods on average.

- The Program has had a particularly positive outcome for female Aboriginal clients who have achieved relatively lower rates of returning to custody in comparison to National and ACT reported figures.

In terms of the effectiveness of the Extended Throughcare model, the findings are:

- Stakeholders highlighted the immediate post-release period, the length of the Program, encouraging clients to engage with services, and helping clients to access stable accommodation as the Program's areas of greatest impact.
- Overall, stakeholders said that ACTCS and non-government organisations (NGOs) had coordinated effectively. Stakeholders felt that the Program's flexibility aided service coordination between ACTCS and other service providers.

While some areas for improvement were identified, the Program has been very effective in terms of outcomes for clients. The evaluation also showed that, although there were some limitations with the data, the estimated cost savings substantially offset program funding.

The full report is available at www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/research/projects/throughcare-evaluation/

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