



**Government of South Australia**  
Department for Correctional Services

# Research Agenda: 2015-2017



**To guide researchers in the key research and evaluation priorities of the SA Department for Correctional Services for the next three years**

Strategic Policy, Projects and Partnerships  
Offender Development Directorate



**Government of South Australia**  
Department for Correctional Services

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# Foreword

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I am pleased to introduce the SA Department of Correctional Services (DCS) *Research Agenda 2015 -2017*.

DCS has committed to move forward using a research agenda that will guide future strategy through evidence-based policy and practice development. The DCS *Research Agenda 2015-2017* provides a guide for the research community by setting out the department's key research priorities for the next three years.

In line with South Australia's Strategic Priorities and complemented by the department's own Strategic Plan, the Agenda aims to significantly contribute in directing specific approaches for the management and rehabilitation of Correction's prisoner and offender populations. It will, in turn, also contribute to the broader research community and through greater collaboration with partners - aid in identifying areas of research that can most benefit and build on existing evidence and correctional knowledge base.

DCS endeavours to pursue research and evaluation in a way that can inform and support policy development, program and service design and, effective decision making.

To support this process both internal and external research stakeholders have been engaged in the development this agenda. And, by adopting an applied research approach this will enable the department to focus on specific areas which will contribute directly to improving service provision for prisoners, offenders and safety outcomes for the community.

Research topics identified herein will be undertaken by DCS or through external partnerships via collaborative effort that aims to ensure we are progressing key priorities for corrections through mutual benefit.

**David Brown**

Chief Executive

Department for Correctional Services

South Australia

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# 1. Abbreviations

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<b>AGD</b>	Attorney General's Department
<b>AWP</b>	Adelaide Women's Prison
<b>ARC</b>	Adelaide Remand Centre
<b>APC</b>	Adelaide Pre-release Centre
<b>CC</b>	Community Corrections
<b>CJ</b>	Criminal Justice
<b>CM</b>	Case management
<b>CJSR</b>	Criminal Justice Sector Reform
<b>DCS</b>	Department for Correctional Services
<b>OCSAR</b>	Office for Crime Statistics and Research
<b>OD</b>	Offender Development
<b>PAP</b>	Port August Prison
<b>SAPOL</b>	SA Police
<b>SP</b>	Special Prisons
<b>SPPP</b>	Strategic Policy, Projects and Partnerships
<b>SWO</b>	Statewide Operations
<b>SMU</b>	Sentence Management Unit
<b>REMC</b>	Research and Evaluation Management Committee
<b>YLP</b>	Yatala Labour Prison

## 2. Introduction

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The Department for Correctional Services (DCS) serves a vital role in the criminal justice system in South Australia. This is broadly reflected in the Department's strategic vision which seeks to achieve 'a safer community by protecting the public and reducing reoffending'.

The *Research Agenda 2015-17* is a time-bound companion document to the department's *Research and Evaluation Framework* and sets out the priority areas guiding DCS's research activities throughout the next three years. It is intended as a guide to help the broader research community identify areas of research that will add most value for DCS and contribute to the existing correctional and criminal justice (CJ) knowledge base.

The overarching purpose of the Agenda is to build an evidence-based body of knowledge that can be used by decision-makers and practitioners to support and assist DCS meet its objectives and achieve its aspirations. It is also intended to guide researchers towards applied rather than pure research to help DCS draw more readily upon findings and integrate insights into policies and practice.

The questions presented in this document do not aim to be an exhaustive list, but rather a guide to DCS's current and immediate priorities and, as a guide or prompt for researchers. Proposed research topics aim to be rich in scope and to not inadvertently exclude emerging areas of correctional or related criminal justice research interest.

We are looking to researchers and the research sector to assist DCS understand and find potential strategies and solutions to current and emerging challenges, but also help us innovate and trial new and emerging knowledge that encourages a 'learning' culture.

Our department needs evidence and insights that can inform and shape our policies and practice as well as enhance our decision-making. We want to build the knowledge and skills of our workforce. We also want to evaluate our progress and learn what we can do better and how we can shape and improve our services to achieve more effective outcomes both for the community and with offenders.

While it is envisaged that some research or evaluation topics and questions will be undertaken internally or commissioned more formally by DCS, some research may be pursued by external researchers independently or in partnership with the department.

We are interested in forming partnerships with research institutions, our colleagues across the South Australian criminal justice sector and other government agencies interested in advancing research and evaluation knowledge across the themes within this document.

If you are interested in conducting research in a complementary area, or if you have research questions not identified in the Agenda that fit under one of its broad themes, please contact us to seek support for your proposal.

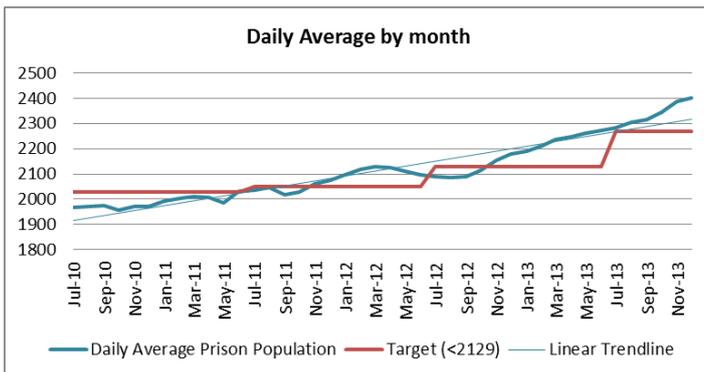
For more information regarding the agenda and application processes contact **Strategic Policy, Projects and Partnerships** on Ph: 08 8226 9139 or Email: [DCSResearch@sa.gov.au](mailto:DCSResearch@sa.gov.au)

### 3. Context for Research Agenda

#### South Australian prisoner snapshot

The SA Department of Correctional Services (DCS) collects a wide range of demographic data about prisoner population to gain an understanding of the characteristics of prisoners and their backgrounds. Statistical profiles are compiled each year and reviews of the changing nature of demographic data are undertaken to detect trends.

In the past ten years, prison numbers have increased Australia wide. On 1 June 2014, the SA total prison population was 2471 (including Remand prisoners).



In the past ten years South Australian (SA) prison numbers have increased from 1485 on 30 June 2004 to 2431 on 23 February 2014, a 63.7 per cent increase. The Northern Territory is the only state/territory to have experienced larger growth than SA.

Potential explanations for this growth include;

- The impact of legislation changes
- The seriousness and incidence of particular types of offending
- Number of police and a proactive policing policy
- Variations in magistrate discretionary decisions
- Changes in offending that require a custodial response
- Increase in number of people unable to meet bail conditions
- Increase in the number of people who breach community order conditions
- The rate of apprehension and delay to bring offenders before the courts
- Media and community pressure regarding types of offending i.e. one punch, contravention of intervention orders etc.

#### More detailed profile breakdown

In the past 20 years, male and female numbers have grown significantly. Male numbers have nearly doubled, increasing by 74.2 per cent and female numbers have more than doubled, increasing by 140.8 per cent.

Since 30 June 2004, the proportion of sentenced prisoners in South Australian has remained steady, decreasing from 65.4 per cent of the prison population on 30 June 2004 to 64.5 per cent of the prisoner population on 16 September 2014.

Over the past ten years, the Department has experienced a consistently high percentage of prisoners on remand. South Australia has the highest proportion of prisoners on remand in Australia (34.4 per cent on 16 September 2014). The remaining 1.1% reflects prisoners with an unknown status at the time of counting.

The South Australian prison population is also ageing and has the oldest prison population in Australia. Important, and growing prisoner segments are prisoners aged 24 and under and prisoners over 50.

Prisoners aged 24 or under represent 14.0 per cent of the prisoner population, and currently, over half (56.2 per cent) are on remand. This age group is also more likely to be imprisoned for a violent or serious offence, Assaults are the most common offence, representing one quarter (25.3 per cent).

The number of prisoners aged over 50 has been steadily increasing over the past ten years and currently represent 14.6 per cent of the prison population. Nearly half (46.2 per cent) of all prisoners in this age group are serving a sentence or on remand for the Sexual Assault offence category. The majority of prisoners in this age group (44.8 per cent) are serving a sentence greater than two years, and a further 19.4 per cent are serving an Indeterminate or Life Sentence.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are over-represented in the South Australian prison system (22.3 per cent), and their numbers have continued to increase over the past ten years.

While the sex offender population has increased since 2004, there has been a decrease in numbers since 2012. This is primarily due to a decrease in the number of child sex offenders, which may well be the result of offenders imprisoned as a result of the Mulligan Inquiry. The increasing number of sex offenders is the most likely cause of the growth in protectee numbers, which have doubled in the past ten years.

### Community Corrections

Courts may decide that an offender should receive a penalty other than custody. These offenders are referred to the department to undertake a community based sanction i.e. Probation, Community Service (Repay SA), Supervised Bail or Intensive Bail Supervision (Court ordered Home Detention).

Offenders are supervised by the department and are often ordered to undertake programs to address their offending behaviour as well as comply with conditions related to their order. In addition to supervising offenders on court orders, the department provides community based supervision for prisoners leaving prison on Parole and Home Detention programs.

A breakdown by order type as at 28 March 2014 is provided below:

Community Order Type	count
Bail	637
Community Mental Health Licence – S269	213
Community Service Orders	888
Financial Penalty Expiated through Repay SA	720
Home Detention Bail Orders	696
Home Detention Bond Orders	2
Home Detention Orders	176
Interstate Orders	14
Other Orders	386
Parole Orders	952
Probation Orders	2196
<b>Sum:</b>	<b>6880</b>

Over the last ten years, overall numbers of community based sanctions has decreased by 1500 (17.5%). This decrease has not been linear as the number of order commencements increased by 780 (9%) between 2004 and 2008 and has subsequently declined by over 2300 (25%) since 2008.



Potential explanations for this include;

- Community and judiciary perceptions about punishment and sentencing
- The seriousness and risk to community associated with particular offences
- The implementation of risk based community supervision practices
- Variations in magistrate discretionary decisions
- Changes in offending that require a custodial response
- The rate of apprehension and its effect on the rate at which offenders are brought before the courts
- Variations in overall socio-economic conditions.

### Factors influencing South Australia's offender and prisoner profile

A review of broader societal demographic trends provides insights into emergent groups at risk of engaging in criminal behaviour (and the potential impact on the correctional system). Richer demographic data and in-depth examination of offender's pre-imprisonment or pre-community order characteristics as well as the shifting social profile of the broader population will enhance DCS's forecasting capacity and can contribute to cross government discussions regarding a safe community and broader criminal justice reform.

Factors that influence offender and prisoner profiles include:

1. Demographic trends and changes in social behaviour
2. Economic factors
3. Societal values and expectations
4. Gender related factors
5. Cultural factors
6. Technological forces
7. Political and legislative forces

## 4. Research and Evaluation Themes

The Department for Correctional Services (DCS) research priorities have been developed via an extensive internal consultation process and a review of recent literature on correctional issues.

A key challenge in developing the Agenda was addressing the broad scope of potential research areas. A scan of national and international corrections research priorities identifies that offender characteristics and behaviour is a priority focus for research effort.

However, “.. the successful creation and implementation of programs (and services) that address these issues is dependent on a range of factors,... (correctional services) operate as a result of complex organisational effort.. and offender management, program (and practice) development as well as implementation occur in an organisational context. Success of rehabilitation and management strategies depends not only on sound criminological and social theory but also on smoothly operating business functions and effective staff..” (Corrections Victoria, 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

In light of this, the department’s strategic planning and management cycle provides a driver and organising framework for prioritising DCS’s research priorities and is built around three key themes:

- Th.1** Managing and Rehabilitating Offenders
- Th.2** Productivity and Performance (capability)
- Th.3** Innovation, Leadership and Engagement

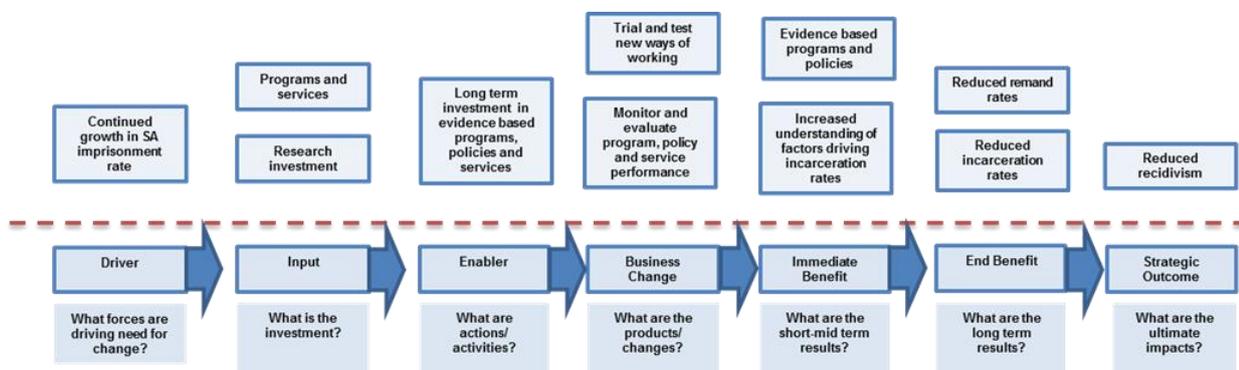
### Considerations for researchers

The department encourages an applied research approach that is systematic and practical in focus and aimed at addressing real and emerging challenges and issues for the department. A mixed methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data is encouraged as a means of enhancing and validating findings and promoting deeper understanding and different perspectives.

Researchers should also consider how their proposed investigation contributes to DCS’s immediate and longer-term ‘change agenda’ as articulated in the department’s Strategic Plan.

A ‘Theory of change’ (TOC) or ‘program logic’ model provides a theoretical framework for positioning research and evaluation activity.

“A theory of change is the articulation of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide a service delivery strategy and are believed to be critical for producing change and improvement. Theories of change represent beliefs about what is needed for the target population and what strategies will enable them to meet those needs. They establish a context for considering the connection between a system’s mission, strategies and actual outcomes, while creating links between who is being served, the strategies or activities that are being implemented, and the desired outcomes.”<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Corrections Victoria Research Strategy 2009-2012

<sup>2</sup> International Network of Strategic Philanthropy (2005). Theory of Change Manual. p.6

## Theme 1: Managing and Rehabilitating Offenders

The purpose of Corrective Services is to provide a safe, secure and humane custodial and community corrections environment in which prisoners and offenders are effectively managed, commensurate with their needs and the risks they pose to the community. Additionally, corrective services aim to reduce the risk of re-offending by providing services and program interventions that address the causes of offending, maximise the chances of successful reintegration into community and encourage offenders to adopt a law abiding way of life. (Report on Government Services, Correctional Services, 2014. S8.1.).

Areas in scope for potential research / evaluation investigation include:

- *Understanding offenders*; demographic characteristics, offence-specific characteristics and cross cutting issues i.e. substance abuse issues, health issues, personal capability.
- *Program and service delivery*; general theories, models and practices associated with offending behaviour and implications to practice and service design i.e. Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model, Good Lives Model, multifactorial approaches, use and limitations of risk and needs assessment and translation into supervision plans, issues and challenges associated with implementing 'through-care' initiatives across a correctional system, interventions that develop offenders' resources and opportunities i.e. cultural, literacy and vocational, transition readiness.
- *Case management (CM) and offender supervision*; structures and practice of effective offender supervision, motivating and managing change, 'whole of sentence' management, models of CM supervision, the relational aspect and approaches to CM, community, social and personal contexts in which the process of and obstacles to change are situated.
- *Sentencing and offender management strategy*; alternative sentencing options i.e. Home Detention, community based orders, intensive supervision orders as alternatives to prison for different offender groups, the prison structured day, management of high risk groups i.e. sex and violent offenders, prolific offenders on short-term sentences, offenders with complex needs, therapeutic communities, the impact of magistrate/ community perceptions on sentencing and the role of technology as an offender management tool.

## Theme 2: Productivity and Performance (capability)

This theme is concerned with the department's capacity and capability to manage an evolving and increasingly complex offender population within a context of effectively utilising resources.

Theme 2 comprises various areas of enquiry aimed at enabling DCS in its efforts to build an organisation capable of achieving its strategic objectives amid a changing environment. It covers areas typically regarded by the organisational development field as necessary when building organisational effectiveness and sustainability and includes; workforce planning and development, system and process development, resource allocation, infrastructure development and organisational culture.

Areas in scope for research and evaluation investigation are:

- *Workforce planning and development*; changing learning and development needs of a diverse workforce, professional challenges in managing an increasingly complex offender population, changing role of professional staff in a risk management / compliance-oriented culture, job design, recruitment and L&D alongside emerging technological and societal trends, work satisfaction, models of leadership, and succession planning challenges.

- *Systems and process development*; capacity needed to respond to issues affecting performance in a timely manner, data enhancements required to meet diverse organisational needs, new systems of review and measurement, data and auditing processes to monitor, evaluate and improve DCS services and systems, benefit measurement.
- *Resource allocation*; decision making processes, criteria and systems, the use of actuarial tools to support business and practice decision-making, cost-benefit and cost-effective evaluations, characteristics and complexities of creating evidence-based policy, emerging evaluation models, quantifying the value of services and programs, emerging trends in outcome measurement.
- *Infrastructure development*; creating secure prison environments that are also conducive for change and transition readiness, meeting the environmental needs of different prisoner cohort groups including Aboriginal and prisoners with debilitating health issues (ageing, mental health issues, physical disabilities etc.), the emergence of therapeutic communities within prisons, advances in built environments that can be used to improve sustainability of DCS operations.

### **Theme 3: Innovation, Leadership and Engagement**

This theme is concerned with new ways of thinking, working and partnering that might support the department to better tackle emerging and existing challenges i.e. declining resources, greater police detection/ apprehension, growth in remand, offender and prisoner numbers and diversity, and government and community expectation.

Our department needs evidence and insights (including research of a preparatory nature i.e. literature reviews, environmental scans) to inform and shape our work (as well as our collaborations with partners) and sector outcomes.

Areas in scope for research and evaluation investigation are:

- *Renewal, innovation and improvement*; developing and improving innovation capability i.e. idea creation/ problem solving/ solution finding/ risk taking, institutionalising innovation, innovation tools and approaches, building a research and development culture, organisation design, business planning and performance measures, new or transforming existing ways of working toward better-performance outcomes, evaluations of current DCS strategies / frameworks / policies and initiative effectiveness.
- *Leading and working together*; building an inclusive organisational culture, building leadership capabilities, strategic innovation, the impact of leadership on organisational innovation, knowledge-sharing, partner capacity building, partnership and engagement models, emerging contracting models and agreements between government and non-government, metrics to measure success of partnering activities, co-design practice for service / program development and innovation.
- *System reform and improvement*; opportunities for improved cross-sector reform and improvement, legislation and criminal justice reform change and flow-on impacts to corrections, community and magistrate perceptions and attitudes to crime and offenders, cross-sector responses to offending, offender management, rehabilitation and reintegration .

## 2015-17 DCS Research Priorities

### Tier 1: *Top research priorities*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would an alternative community based order look like?</li> <li>• Examine and compare characteristics of a group of prisoners with a cognitive disability and a group that does not, to assist DCS with the development of more differentiated and systematic response?</li> <li>• Conduct an environmental scan investigating the challenges in managing defendants on remand and prisoners serving short-term sentences with a focus on assessment, case management and assuring effective program delivery. What are the implications for the structuring and intensity of program delivery and post-release services?</li> <li>• Investigate the ideal response to bail and order breaches in terms of moderating behaviour and preventing remand in custody.</li> <li>• Who is most likely to succeed on parole? What are the implications for current management and practice giving consideration to gender, ethnicity and culture?</li> <li>• Investigate pathways and approaches that have shown impact supporting and sustaining Aboriginal desistence (including gender considerations)?</li> <li>• Looking at the multi-faceted elements that need to be considered in developing a response to domestic and family violence within a correctional system (consider gender, ethnicity and culture)? What are the implications for management and practice?</li> <li>• What are effective approaches for those offenders who circulate frequently in and out of prison with a substance abuse problem? What does the evidence show in terms of supported detox/ substitution program effectiveness with this group?</li> <li>• What is ideal in-reach and post-release service provision for prisoners with a substance abuse problem? Is substance abuse whilst in prison predictive of behaviour upon release?</li> <li>• What impact does promoting community correction orders as a viable alternative to prison have on the role and expectations of community correction case managers? What are the skills, abilities, attributes required to promote 'offender change' and how can these skillsets be recruited / or developed?</li> </ul>
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### Tier 2: *Other research of interest*

<b>Managing and Rehabilitating Offenders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beyond gender based pathways to crime what are the similarities and differences in offending by women and men? What are the implications for corrections policy and practice?</li> <li>• Are sex offenders who assess high on sexual deviance more likely to be emotionally avoidant?</li> <li>• Conduct an environmental scan of multi-agency arrangements in prison health settings. What are the learnings and implications for management and practice?</li> <li>• What is underpinning a perceived growing trend between women and violent crime?</li> <li>• What are the health needs of the ageing SA prisoner population, and what are the implications for DCS in terms of care in custody and transition arrangements?</li> <li>• How does pornographic anime fit into sex offending?</li> <li>• Do prison based programs that support women's parenting and child contact influence re-offending outcomes?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective are DCS programs at treating people who are high in psychopathy? What is the impact on other treatment group participants of having people high in psychopathy in the group?</li> <li>• Conduct an environmental scan investigating best practice response to 'at-risk' individuals in secure custody? What does the literature recommend as effective practice in decreasing risk of suicide/self-harm upon release from custody?</li> <li>• What are the varying educational and vocational needs of prisoners/offenders noting the diversity of age ranges and life stage employability of prisoner and offender population mix?</li> <li>• Are standardised assessment instruments appropriate and effective for assessing the risks and needs of 'elderly' prisoners - how is 'elderly' defined given the differential between the health of prisoners and that of the general population (including culture, gender)?</li> <li>• What can we teach prisoners that will increase their employment opportunities (what works what doesn't) and in relation to female prisoners – do we need a different approach for women?</li> <li>• How can the non-government sector be engaged to promote sustainable employment opportunities for Aboriginal offenders?</li> <li>• Why are Aboriginal volunteer numbers to work with offenders/ prisoners low? What recruitment strategies could be employed to increase volunteering interest amongst the Aboriginal community in corrections?</li> </ul>
<b>Productivity and Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the infrastructure implications for correctional facilities in the medium and longer term associated with a prison population with increasingly complex health and behavioural needs?</li> <li>• What do we know about staff who suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the workplace – could this have been prevented?</li> <li>• Does recruitment testing work? What 'best' and 'promising' practices can be identified to enhance recruitment and retention success?</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation, leadership and engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role do family and community play in offender rehabilitation? What does the literature suggest and how can this be operationalised to include families and communities as key participants in the case management of individuals?</li> <li>• How do we improve the assessment and measurement of organisational performance? How can DCS embed a systematic approach to measurement?</li> <li>• What are the enablers / barriers to engaging in research and drawing on research findings experienced by practitioners and decision-makers involved in policy formulation and implementation?</li> <li>• How effective are our current systems and processes to capture and enable innovation and continuous improvement?</li> <li>• How effective are our systems for the development of projections data and trends? How can we better utilise trend/projection data / information to better lead influence system reform?</li> <li>• What impact has 'Shaping Corrections' had on DCS reform change and business improvements?</li> </ul>