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Report 1

Identifying the demographic, sentencing and criminogenic features of offenders entering the EQUIPS programs in custody and in the community

The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and
Substance Use

Dr Marlee Bower, Dr Lexine Stapinski, Associate Professor Nicola
Newton and Dr Emma Barrett

Contact

The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use

Level 6, Jane Foss Russell Building,
G02, Camperdown NSW 2006

Marlee.Bower@sydney.edu.au

sydney.edu.au

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Scope of this report

The following briefing report is intended to give an overview of the first stages of a process evaluation conducted by the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, The University of Sydney, into the Explore, Question, Understand, Investigate, Practice, Succeed (EQUIPS) program run by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) for offenders in custody and in the community. The report examines the demographic, sentencing and criminogenic features of offenders who were allocated to attend EQUIPS programs in custody and in the community between 2015-2018 (inclusive). The findings represented into this report are subject to finalisation and remain unpublished to date. The report has not been approved for publication and is intended for internal review at this stage.

Background

Over the past decade the national Australian average custodial population has increased by 52% (14,897 persons) (Corrective Services Australia, 2019). This figure has remained relatively stable over 2019. New South Wales (NSW) has the largest custodial jurisdiction with approximately one third (31%, 13,553 persons) of the general custodial population. The numbers of offenders serving Community Corrections orders across Australia nationally is larger than the custodial population. An average of 69 634 offenders per day were serving Community Corrections orders in 2017-18 (ROGS, 2019). The proportion of particular subpopulations also differs within Community Corrections compared to Custodial Corrections, with females representing 19.5% of the national community offender population (much higher than comparative prison population). The average daily number of offenders on Community Corrections orders in NSW has increased by 16.6% over the past 5 years from 16 411 in 2012-13 to 19 136 in 2017-18 (ROGS, 2019).

In the context of increasing levels of incarceration and community supervision, there is a clear opportunity and need for Corrective Services NSW to use periods of supervision to engage offenders in therapeutic programs that reduce their likelihood of reoffending post-release. The EQUIPS suite of programs was developed by CSNSW as a form of correctional intervention for offender rehabilitation in both custodial and community settings (Juarez & Howard, 2018). These programs were developed in reference to the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model primarily to aid offenders in practicing strategies for reducing antisocial behaviour and promote prosocial behaviour.¹ The EQUIPS suite is grounded in a CBT framework and is comprised of four programs:

- **EQUIPS Foundation:** This program is not offence-specific and it can be presented as a standalone intervention for general offending behaviour, or as a precursor for participation in other programs. It aims to introduce the offender to rehabilitative interventions, reduce generalised risk of reoffending and increase participation in prosocial opportunities.²
- **EQUIPS Addiction:** This program offers support for participants to minimise addictive behaviours. This program is split between group processes and self-management tasks with a focus on aligning skill development to their personal experiences.³
- **EQUIPS Domestic Abuse:** This program encourages offenders to accept responsibility for their intimate partner and domestic violence and abuse offence-related behaviours. There is a focus on increasing their level of accountability to minimise future behaviours. This

¹ See New South Wales Corrective Services Compendium pp. 16.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

program is based on a psycho-behavioural framework with a strong therapy-based delivery.⁴

- **EQUIPS Aggression:** This program is focused on increasing participants' behavioural control and their ability to manage negative life experiences. This approach focuses on the direct and peripheral causes of aggressive behaviour in an attempt to minimise future aggression.

Each program has five modules with four sessions of two hours each (or 40 hours combined).⁵ While each program can be delivered as a standalone intervention, offenders can be referred to multiple EQUIPS programs if they are deemed to have different needs to be addressed, and even repetitions of the same program, if it is determined that they require extended treatment dosage or maintenance of therapeutic benefit, in accordance with their identified criminogenic needs and case management pathway.

There are several eligibility criteria that offenders referred to EQUIPS programs must meet. However, even if a person meets each of these criteria, they may still be deemed unsuitable for a program following assessment by a staff member. According to the criteria, offenders must have:

- Medium to high risk of recidivism according to the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R)
- A current offence resulting in a period of supervision or incarceration.
- Sufficient supervision time remaining in their total sentence/order to complete the program of at least 6 months (where those with short sentences are prioritized).
- No active psychotic symptoms, alcohol or drug intoxication or withdrawal symptoms at time of program delivery.

Since its inception in January 2015, the EQUIPS suite of programs has been a cornerstone of CSNSW's model of therapeutic intervention. This has become more prescient in recent times, given recent NSW Government reforms on Strategies to Reduce Reoffending that led to several reforms associated with extending EQUIPS. This includes expansion of EQUIPS delivery in the community through contracting of external service delivery agencies, the development of multiple High Intensity Treatment Units (HIPUs) at several NSW correctional centres that facilitate intensive delivery of EQUIPS to offenders with short sentences, and reforms around improving referral sequencing pathways to promote increases in treatment dosage.

Despite the centrality of EQUIPS to CSNSW's intervention strategy, there has been minimal research conducted to understand or evaluate EQUIPS operations either as a combined suite of programs or in regards to specific programs.⁶ The current report marks the beginning of a comprehensive agenda of research investigating the implementation of the EQUIPS programs, that are aimed to optimise best practice in business-as-usual CSNSW operations and to understand and provide context to the role of EQUIPS in Reducing Reoffending.

Aim

This report aims to identify the demographic, sentencing and criminogenic features of offenders entering the EQUIPS programs in custody and the community. This information is vital to knowing the profile of offenders that access each of the different EQUIPS programs in each of its delivery settings – both in custody and in the community.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See CSNSW policy for EQUIPS delivery (for internal use only).

⁶ The Bureau Of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) has released a report on the use of EQUIPS Domestic Abuse in the community and reoffending outcomes.

Method

A cross-sectional study of administrative data, collected routinely by CSNSW, was conducted to determine the demographic, sentencing and criminogenic factors associated with offenders allocated to each of the four EQUIPS programs both in custody and in the community. This includes offenders who were referred and then deemed suitable to participate and subsequently allocated to an upcoming program session. Data was obtained for all adult offenders managed by CSNSW who had been referred to an EQUIPS program in custody or in the community between 2 January 2015 (the implementation of EQUIPS) and 31 December 2018. This resulted in a total of 61,459 referrals to EQUIPS programs attributed to 18,963 unique offenders. The target sample was defined by their referral to any of the EQUIPS programs in custody or in the community. Relevant search functions applied to the CSNSW Offender Information Management System (OIMS) was used to identify the sample of offenders. Ethical approval to conduct this research was obtained from CSNSW, The University of Sydney HREC (2019/730) and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) HREC (1560/19).

Descriptive statistics are reported for the total sample (i.e., for all referrals to EQUIPS programs between 2015-2018) and are presented to provide an initial outline of offender characteristics and referral throughputs and pathways.⁷ Summary statistics show all EQUIPS program allocations that occurred during the study period (2015 to 2018 inclusive). Some offenders received EQUIPS program referrals through both custodial and community-corrections staff and therefore have data across both contexts.

Differences in the distribution of offender characteristics across EQUIPS programs were analysed using a series of chi-square tests for categorical data.⁸ Tests were conducted separately within custody- and the community-based referral samples. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 using a predetermined alpha level of $p < .001$. For statistically significant chi-square tests ($p < .001$), adjusted residual scores were interpreted to examine where significant group differences existed (see Appendix). Post hoc analysis of adjusted residual scores of > 2 or < -2 were deemed to be significant (Macdonald & Gardner, 2000). In addition to reporting the statistical significance of the relationships observed (p values), Cramer's V (ϕ_c) was also interpreted as the effect size measure to report meaningful or 'practical' significance (Khalilzadeh & Tasci, 2017; Sun, Pan, & Wang, 2010). Cramer's V is used to measure the strength or magnitude of the association between two categorical variables that have more than two levels, and it ranges from 0 to 1 (Ferguson, 2009; Sun et al., 2010). In line with previous research and statistical guidelines, the recommended minimum effect size representing a 'practically' significant effect is $\phi_c \geq 0.2$ (Cohen, 1992; Ferguson, 2009; O'Keeffe et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2010).

⁷ Data for the same offender could have been included in the analyses more than once as they were referred to more than one EQUIPS program (i.e., data was collected each time they were referred to an EQUIPS program).

⁸ A sub-sample was used for this Chi-Squared analysis. Chi-Squared tests require an assumption of independence between observations and several individuals had been referred to multiple EQUIPS programs over the study period. While 80% of all offenders were allocated only to one program the remaining 20% were allocated to multiple programs violating this assumption of independence. To overcome this methodological issue, inferential analyses focused only on those who were allocated to one program over the study period. This strategy had the added benefit of detecting the 'true' cohort allocated to each EQUIPS program, rather than double counting the characteristics of offenders who completed multiple programs. Selecting only those who were only allocated to one program indicates they were provided with a single treatment pathway and therefore were likely not pushed through a more complex EQUIPS pathway treatment process, involving referral to multiple programs to address different needs.

Findings

Of the 61,459 referrals to EQUIPS programs between 2 January 2015, until 31 December 2018, approximately half (52.8%; n=32,464) occurred through the custodial pathway (meaning referrals were made through a custodial staff member). The remaining 47.2% were made through a community pathway, meaning through a Community Corrections staff member.

As depicted in **Figure 1**, less than half of referrals to EQUIPS during this time period were conferred into allocations/program participation. The conferral rate appeared to differ according to referral location, with community-corrections staff showing a slightly higher conferral rate to allocations than custodial corrections staff (49.3% vs. 44.8%) and to program participation (41.21% vs. 39.8%). Referral conferral rate also depended on programs, with EQUIPS Aggression showing the lowest conferral rate of all programs (39.2% to allocation and 34.74% participation).

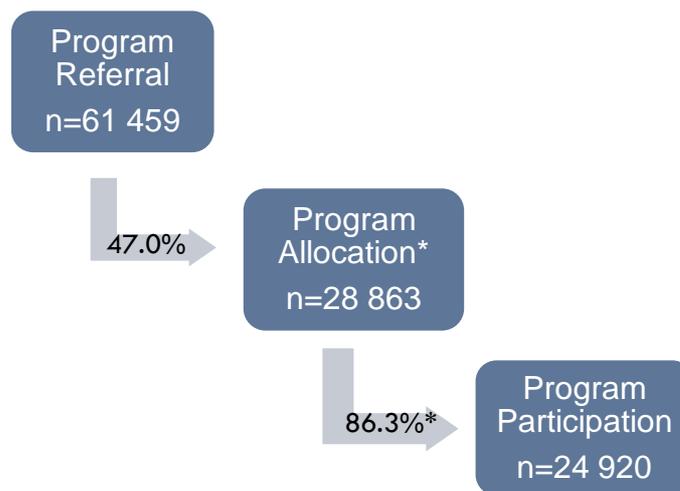


Figure 1 Process diagram depicting the number of offenders moving between program referral, allocation and participation between 2015-2018.

**Note that this calculation excludes 236 offenders who bypassed the allocation stage and went straight to participate in a program. 206 of these were referred through the custodial referral pathway and the remaining 30 were through the community referral pathway.*

Demographic characteristics of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs

Age

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, three quarters (74.8%) of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs were between the ages of 18-39.

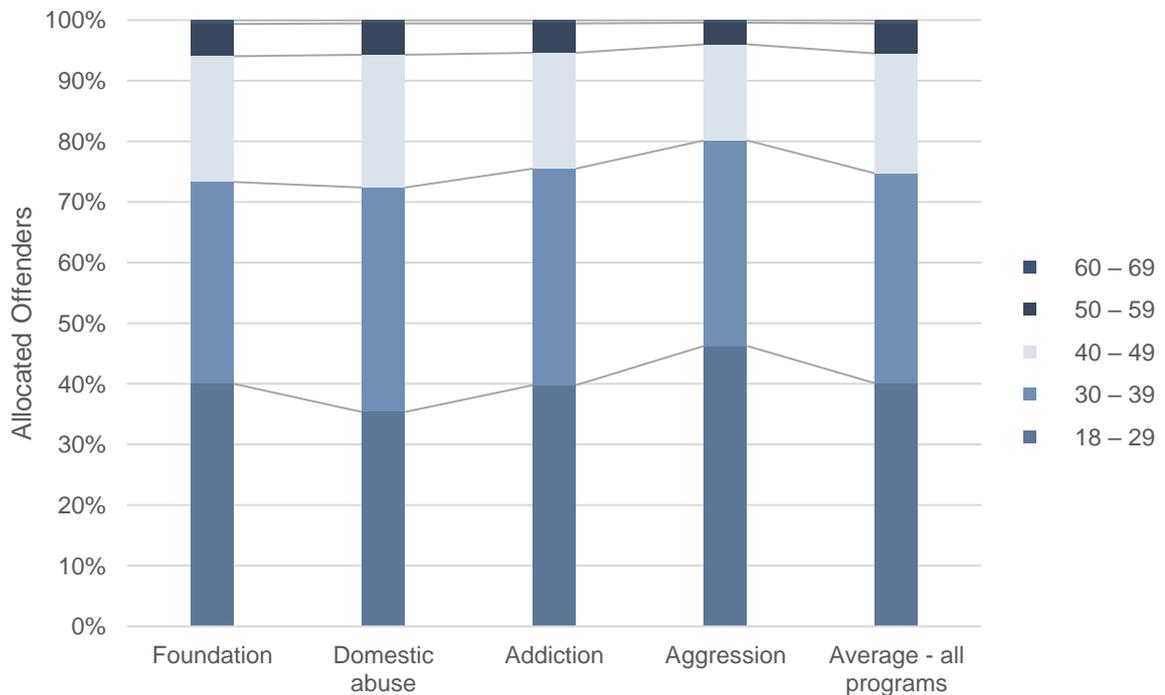


Figure 2 Age at referral for all offenders allocated to EQUIPS Foundation, Domestic Abuse, Addiction, Aggression or all programs (on average) between 2015-2018 (inclusive)

Gender

The majority of offenders (90.8%) allocated to EQUIPS programs were male. Almost all those allocated to Domestic Abuse were male (99.9%), followed by Aggression (94.9%), Addiction (90%) and Foundation (86.2%). Women were more likely to be allocated to the Foundation program (13.8%) and least likely to be allocated to Domestic Abuse (0.1%). The ratio of men to women allocated to EQUIPS was higher in custody-based referrals (93% vs 7%) compared to community-based referrals (88.5% vs 11.5%).

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

On average, 34% of offenders allocated to EQUIPS were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with very slight differences between the custody pathway (35.1%) compared to the community pathway (32.9%). Across programs this figure ranged from 31.4% in Foundation, 34.3% in Domestic Abuse, 36.0% in Addiction and 36.8% in Aggression.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

A small proportion (3.1%) of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs were Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD). This rate was consistent across referral pathways and program types.

Education

The majority of offenders allocated to EQUIPS (87.5%) had not completed year 10, suggesting consistently low levels of education. This number was very similar across referral pathways and each of the program types.

Relationship status – married or in a relationship

Over one-quarter of offenders (28.7%) reported being in a relationship (either married or de facto) and this rate was similar across all programs and referral pathways. However, offenders allocated to Domestic Abuse seemed to be slightly more likely to be in a relationship (31%) than those allocated to other programs (27.7%-29.2%).

Geographic origin of offenders

More offenders (61.1%) allocated to EQUIPS came from major cities prior to their offence than any other type of geographic region, including regional (36.4%) and remote (1.6%) locations. Offenders allocated across custodial and community referral pathways did not appear to differ greatly in the remoteness of their geographic origin. Over a third (34.5%) of offenders allocated to EQUIPS came from geographic areas who rated in the top two deciles of the ABS Index of Relative Disadvantage in Australia.

Other demographic characteristics of allocated offenders⁹

The following data on other demographic characteristics, including history of homelessness, out of home care and disability reflects the characteristics of a smaller subset of offenders who answered relevant questions on an Inmate Screening Questionnaire on entry to custody. These findings should be treated as indicative of trends within custodial populations allocated to EQUIPS, rather than generalisable to the population of those referred to EQUIPS. Over half (54% or n=3563) of offenders allocated to EQUIPS reported being homeless prior to their offence and a quarter (23.8%) reported that they thought they would need assistance with accommodation when they left custody. Almost one-in-five (18.7%) had been in Out of Home Care during their lifetime. The majority (72.6%) self-reported no disability of any kind on entry to custody. The most common disability reported was mental health related, which constituted 16.9% of allocated offenders.

Sentencing characteristics of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs

Custody vs community order at referral

Half of offenders (51.2%) allocated to EQUIPS programs were in full-time custody at referral. This proportion differed significantly across programs. Allocations to Addiction were the most likely to be associated with offenders in full-time custody at referral (69.7%), followed by Aggression (68.7%) then Foundation (42.9%) and Domestic Abuse (23.8%). Approximately half (50.8%) of allocations to EQUIPS programs were for offenders who had a community order at referral. There was a significant difference within EQUIPS program allocations and the presence of a community order at referral. For example, more than three quarters (75.7%) of allocations to Domestic Abuse were for offenders who had a community order at referral, followed by 59.8% of allocations to Foundation whereas only around one third of offenders allocated to Addiction and Aggression had a community order (or 32.8% and 32.5%, respectively).

Other sentencing characteristics

Just over two-thirds of all offenders allocated to EQUIPS (69.6%) had a parole period attached to their sentence. Almost all of those referred to EQUIPS through the custodial pathway (95.3%) had a

⁹ Results for this section taken from Inmate Screening Questionnaire, meaning the sample was limited to those who had entered custody (and even then, only n=6594 offenders who had entered custody were asked each of these questions), but they provide an interesting insight into the life experiences of people entering EQUIPS.

parole period attached to their sentence, compared to less than half of those referred through Community Corrections (43.4%). Over a third (38.3%) of all offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs had a current offence under domestic violence legislation on referral to EQUIPS, although the number was highest amongst those allocated to Domestic Abuse (90.9%) compared to all other programs where just over a quarter of allocated offenders had a current offence under domestic violence legislation. However, less than 2% of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs had a current offence under sex offence legislation at referral. The highest rate of sex offenders were allocated to Addiction (4.4% of all allocations) compared to other programs. These low numbers are consistent with EQUIPS suitability criteria in which offenders with sex offending conviction are deemed ineligible to participate in EQUIPS programs apart from Addiction.

Incarceration and conviction history

One-in-five allocations to EQUIPS (21.0%) were for offenders who had 0-1 convictions prior to their current index offence. Around 40% had had 2-8 convictions over their lifetime, and another 21% had 8-19 offences and over 19 convictions over their lifetime, respectively. Offenders allocated to Aggression were the most likely to have only 0-1 prior convictions (24.6% compared to average across programs 21.0%) and those allocated to Domestic Abuse were the least likely to have 0-1 prior convictions (17.6%), and were more likely to have 2-8 prior convictions (43.6% compared to average across programs 37.4%). Offenders' conviction history appeared to differ according to their referral pathway. As is evident in **Figure 3**, offenders allocated through the custodial pathway appeared to have more extensive history of convictions than those allocated through the community pathway.

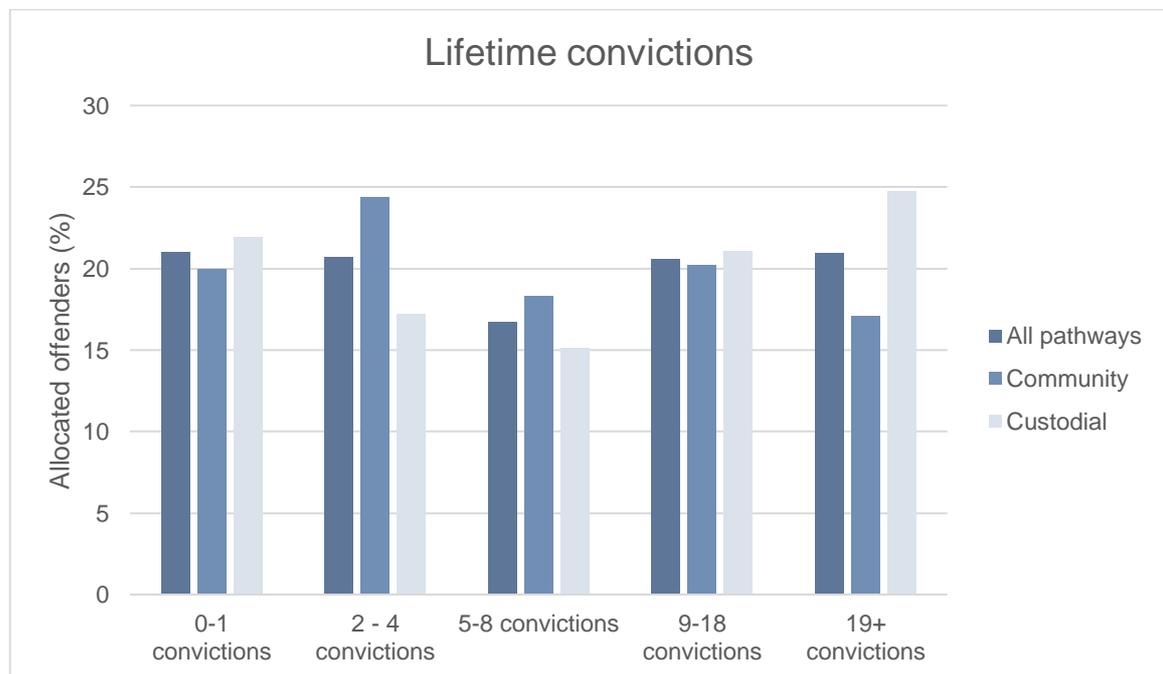


Figure 3 the percentage of all offenders who had 0-1, 2-4, 5-8, 9-18 or 19+ convictions over their lifetime prior to their EQUIPS referral. Results are stratified by referral pathway – either custodial, community or on average (across both pathways).

Overall most offenders allocated to EQUIPS had some history of incarceration before their index offence, with two-thirds (67.7%) having spent at least one day in custody. Offenders referred through Community Corrections were less likely to have a history of incarceration than offenders referred through custodial staff (60.6% of community pathway compared to 74.6% of custodial

pathway). Offenders referred through custodial staff were more likely to have been in custody for longer periods (over 204 or 875 days).

Timing of EQUIPS referral in relation to Earliest Possible Release Date (EPRD)

As illustrated by **Figure 4**, close to half of offenders referred to EQUIPS through the custodial pathway were allocated to EQUIPS programs within six months to one year prior to their EPRD date, as per the timeframe mandated in CSNSW policy. A further 36.1% of allocations were made for offenders whose EPRD had passed. This could reflect a backlog of offenders who were refused parole when EQUIPS programs came online in 2015 or offenders who were back in custody for breaching their parole. The remaining 16.6% of allocations to EQUIPS were made more than one year prior to their EPRD. Offenders allocated to Foundation and Domestic Abuse were much less likely to be allocated to programs prior to their EPRD (57% and 42%, respectively), than those allocated to Addiction and Aggression (both 74.1%). In contrast, offenders were more likely to be allocated to Addiction and Aggression in the time prior to EPRD and less likely to have their allocation fall after their EPRD date.

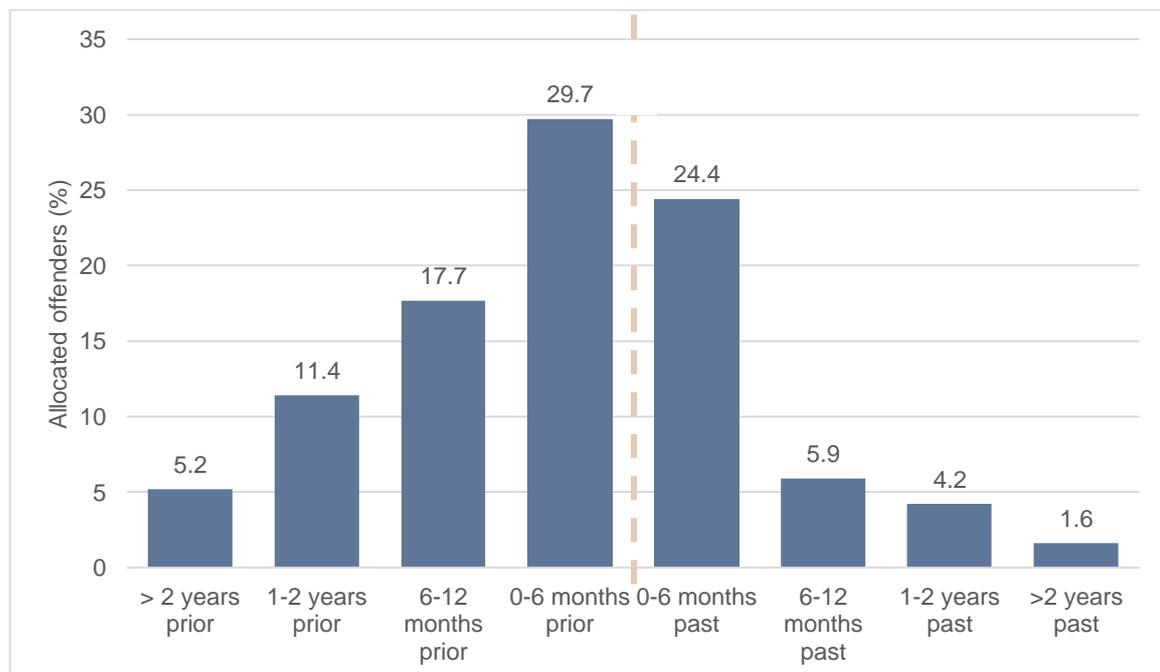


Figure 4 The percentage of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs differentiated by the time between their EPRD and program referral – occurring over 2 years, 1-2 years, 6-12 months or 0-6 months either prior or past their EPRD.

ANZSOC Most Serious Offence (MSO) Scores

The five most serious offences were similar across allocated programs. Serious assault resulting in injury was the most common MSO for those allocated to EQUIPS programs through custody and community. Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter and Common Assault were also in the five most common MSOs in both contexts. There were also differences within the most common MSOs in the two contexts: Breach of parole and aggravated robbery were both within the five most common MSOs in custody whereas stalking and deal or traffic in illicit drugs were in the five most common MSOs in the community.

Criminogenic characteristics of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs

LSI-R Risk Profile

Under CSNSW policy, having an LSI-R risk score of medium or above is a necessary pre-condition to referral to an EQUIPS program, with few exceptions. Consistent with this policy it was very rare (in 2.4% of cases) that an offender with a low or med-low LSI-R score was allocated to a program. Averaged across all programs, 47.3% of allocated offenders had a medium LSI-R, followed by 28.0% with a med-high LSI-R and 6.7% with an LSI-R score of 'high'. Interestingly, just over 15% of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs did not receive an LSI-R assessment within 13 months prior to referral to the program. Those allocated to Foundation were the least likely to have missing LSI-R assessments, whereas those allocated to Addiction were the most likely to have missing LSI-R assessments.

As illustrated in **Figure 5**, allocations made through the custodial pathway were more likely than those made through the community pathway, to go to offenders with high (12% compared to 5%) and med-high (38% compared to 28%), med-low (3% compared to 2%) and low LSI-R (1% compared to 0%) assessment scores.¹⁰ Allocations made through the community pathway were more likely to be to offenders who had 'medium' LSI-R risk scores compared to allocations made through the custodial pathway (57.0% compared to 37.8%, respectively). Additionally, those referred through custody-based staff were around 5% less likely to have an LSI-R assessment within 13 months of their EQUIPS program referral. Taken together, these findings suggest that the offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs through custodial staff tended to be more diverse in terms of their criminogenic risk than those allocated through Community Corrections staff.

¹⁰ These proportions do not include the 15.6% offenders (or n=4506) who had not completed the LSI-R within 13 months of their referral to the EQUIPS program.

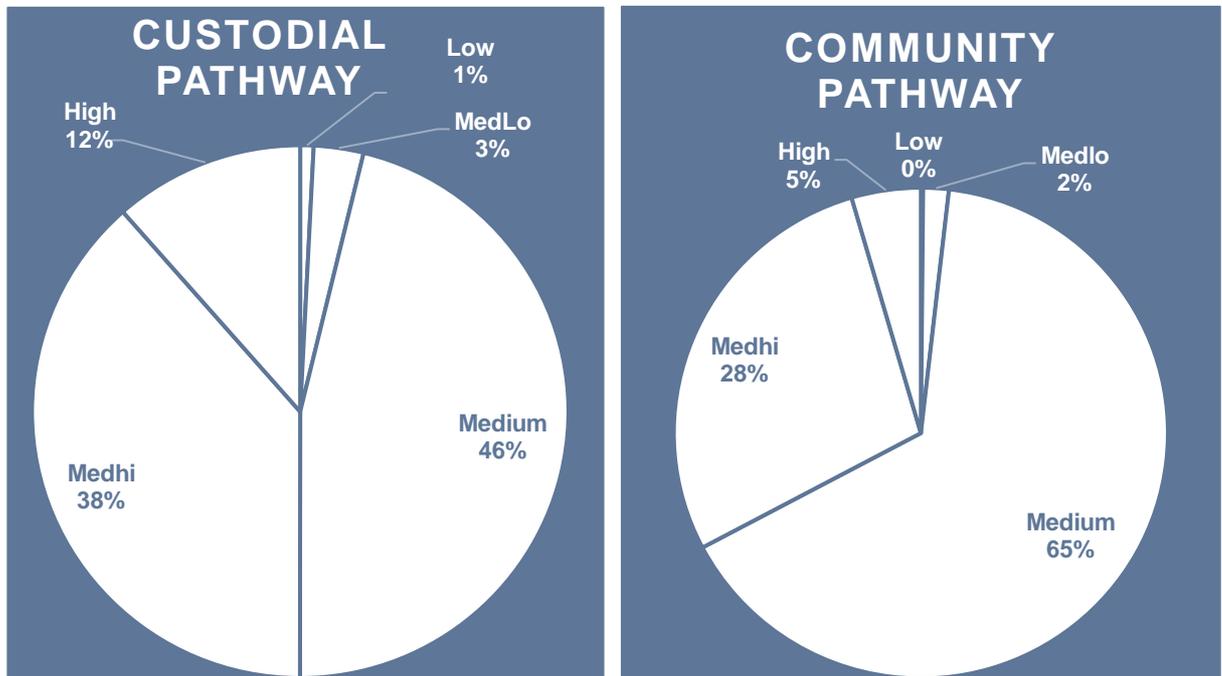


Figure 5 The LSI-R assessed level of criminogenic risk of offenders referred through the custodial pathway (left) or the community pathway (right).

LSI-R Subdomains

Figure 6 shows the proportion of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs who had the highest level of need for each of the different LSI-R subdomains (i.e. those that were assessed as having a 'considerable need for improvement'). The subdomain with the most consistently high level of need was criminal history, although unlike the rest of the subdomains, criminal history is not understood to be a 'dynamic risk factor' because it reflects a person's history and is not amenable to change or improvement through treatment. More than 80% of offenders allocated to EQUIPS had the highest level of need in regard to alcohol/drug problems and leisure and recreation, suggesting that these issues were commonly experienced amongst offender allocated to different programs, not just those specifically targeting this behaviour, e.g. EQUIPS Addiction. The majority of allocated offenders had a high level of need in their financial domain and around 40% had needs in terms of attitude/orientation and education/employment. Less than 10% of allocated offenders have the highest level of need relating to accommodation or companions.

There were no differences between offenders' subdomain scores based on referral pathway or program type that met practical significance. However, some differences were slightly stronger than others ($p < .10$). For example, there was a significantly higher number of offenders allocated to EQUIPS Addiction who had a need for improvement in the alcohol and drug domain than in other programs. Comparative to those referred through the community pathway, a larger proportion of offenders referred through the custodial pathway had a larger need for improvement in the attitude/orientation subdomain than in the community pathway.

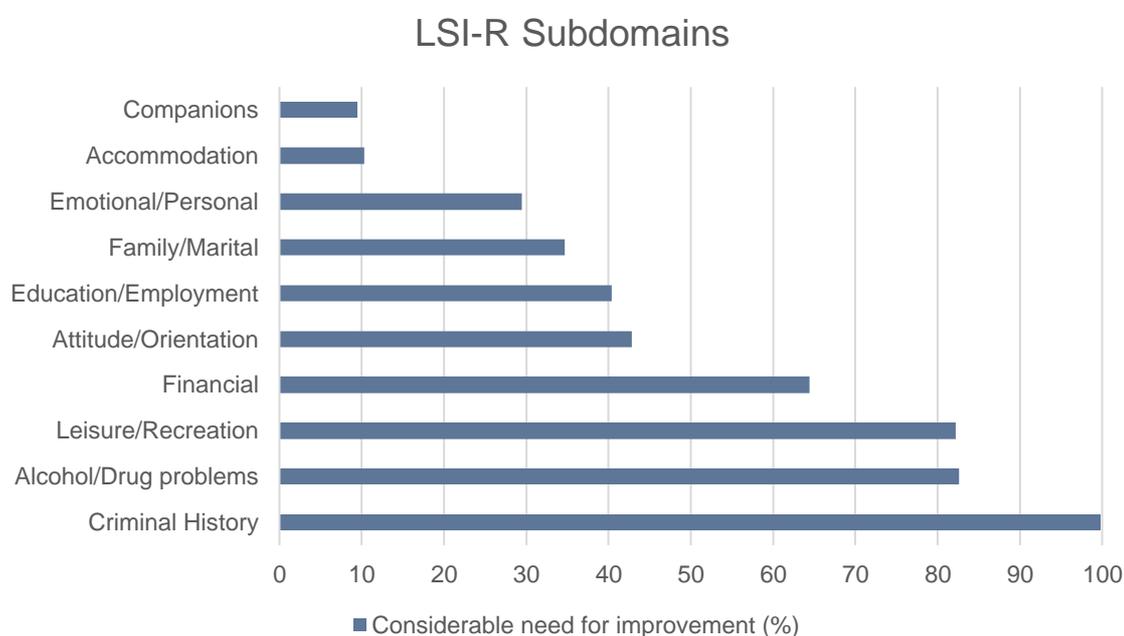


Figure 6 Percentage of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs from 2015-2018 (inclusive) who were assessed as having considerable need for improvement within each of the LSI-R subdomains. In order of highest proportion of allocated offenders to lowest, the subdomains included: Criminal history; Alcohol/Drug problems; Leisure/recreation; Financial; Attitude/Orientation; Education/Employment; Family/Marital; Emotional/Personal; Accommodation; and Companions.

Comparing demographic, sentencing and criminogenic characteristics across EQUIPS programs and referral pathways

As can be observed from the information provided above, there appeared to be some differences in the between EQUIPS program allocations and referral pathways in demographic, sentencing and criminogenic characteristics. However, not all of these apparent differences were statistically and ‘practically’ significant. In this instance, ‘practical significance’ means that the size of the difference is large enough to have practical and applied meanings in the real world. Table 1 summarises the demographic, criminogenic and sentencing characteristics of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs between 2015-2018 (inclusive) with an indication of differences i) between programs and ii) between referral pathways that met statistical and practical significance. There were five domains that reached statistical *and* practical significance:

- **Offenders who having parole attached to sentence;** Almost 70% of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs had a parole period attached to their sentence. Those with parole attached to their sentence were more likely to be allocated to some EQUIPS programs over others. Whereas around half of all offenders allocated to Domestic abuse and Addiction had parole periods (49.8%), a much greater proportion of offenders allocated to Aggression (81.6%) and allocated to Foundation (65.9%) had a parole period attached to their sentence. Almost all (95.3%) of allocations to EQUIPS programs through a custodial pathway were to offenders who had parole periods associated with their sentence and this was significantly more likely than those referred through community corrections.
- **Having at least one current domestic violence offence;** Offenders allocated to Domestic Abuse were much more likely to have at least one current offence under domestic violence legislation at the referral date. Only 9.1% of offenders allocated to Domestic Violence did

not meet this criterion. Offenders referred to EQUIPS through the community pathway were much more likely to have at least one current offence under Domestic Violence legislation at the referral date (49.2%) compared to those referred through the custodial pathway (27.6%).

- **Having at least one current sex offence;** Given that having a current sex offence are exclusion criteria for referral to all EQUIPS programs except for Addiction, it was very uncommon for allocations to EQUIPS to be made for offenders that have at least one current offence being a sex offence at their referral date (this only occurred in 1.7% of cases). However, offenders allocated to Addiction were the most likely to have a current sex offence (4.4%). Offenders allocated to Foundation were the least likely (0.6%), followed by Domestic abuse (0.7%) and Aggression (0.7%).
- **Cumulative time spent incarcerated over lifetime;** Overall most offenders allocated to EQUIPS had some history of incarceration before their prior offence, with 67.7% having spent least one day in custody. Offenders referred through community corrections were more likely to have no history of incarceration than offenders referred through custodial staff (39.4% of community pathway compared to 25.4% of custodial pathway) and were more likely to have been in custody for shorter periods of time over their lifetime (i.e. under seven or 203 days) compared to those who were referred through custodial staff.
- **LSI-R Risk Category;** Offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs through custodial staff tended to be more diverse in terms of their criminogenic risk than those allocated through community-corrections staff. Allocations made through the community pathway were more likely to be to offenders who had 'medium' LSI-R risk scores compared to allocations made through the custodial pathway (57.0% compared to 37.8%, respectively), whereas allocations made through the custodial pathway were much more likely to go to offenders with a range of different risk levels than in the community pathway, including high (9.4% compared to 3.9%), med-high (31.5% compared to 24.6%), med-lo (2.5% compared to 1.5%) and low LSI-R (0.7% compared to 0.1%) assessment scores. This suggests that offenders allocated to custodial staff had a wider variety of risk ratings associated with a program allocation, compared to community corrections referred clients where allocated offenders were more likely to have a medium level of risk. Additionally, those referred through custody-based staff were around 5% more likely to not have had an LSI-R assessment within 13 months of their EQUIPS program referral.

Table 1 Summary of statistically significant and practically significant findings for demographic, sentencing and criminogenic characteristics associated with program allocation and referral pathway

	EQUIPS Program Allocation	Referral Pathway
Demographic Characteristics		
Age at referral	Others > AG*	
Gender (male)	DA > AG > AD > FO*	Cus > Com*
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	AG > AD > FO*	
Married or in a de facto relationship	DA > others*	Cus > Com*
CALD status	AD & AG > others*	
Did not complete year 10		
ABS Remoteness Index – Major Cities	AG > AD*	Cus > Com*
SEIFA Scores		
IRSD – Higher disadvantage	DA > FO*	Com > Cus*
IRSAD – Higher advantage	FO > AD & AG*	Cus > Com*
IER – Higher economic resources	FO > others*	
IEO – Higher education occupation	FO/AD > AG /DA*	Cus > Com*
Sentencing Characteristics		
Parole attached to sentence	AG > FO > DA/AD**	Cus > Com**
At least one current offence under DV legislation at referral date	DA > others**	Com > Cus**
At least one current offence was a sex offence at referral date	AD > others**	Cus > Com*
Number of convictions over lifetime	AD > DA > AG*	Cus > Com*
Cumulative time spent incarcerated over their lifetime	AD > AG > others*	Cus > Com**
Most likely to be allocated prior to EPRD	AD/AG > FO/DA*	N/A
Criminogenic Characteristics		
LSI-R Risk Category	AD/AG > FO/DA	Cus > Com**
LSI-R Education/Employment	Others > DA*	Cus > Com*
LSI-R Financial	AD > FO > DA > AG*	Com > Cus*
LSI-R Family/Marital	DA > others*	Com > Cus*
LSI-R Accommodation	AD > FO/DA*	Cus > Com*
LSI-R Leisure/Recreation	AD > others*	Cus > Com*
LSI-R Companions	AD/AG > DA/FO*	
LSI-R Alcohol/ Drug problems	AD > others*	Cus > Com*
LSI-R Emotional/Personal		Com > Cus*
LSI-R Attitude/Orientation	Others > FO*	Cus > Com*

Note. FO = Foundation, DA = Domestic Abuse, AG = Aggression, AD = Addiction, Cus = Custody, Com = Community

* $p < 0.001$ (statistically significant), ** $\phi_c \geq 0.2$ (practically significant)

Discussion

This report aimed to understand the offender cohorts that are allocated to EQUIPS programs in custody and in the community. Understanding this cohort provides a foundation for, and will inform the results of, our upcoming reports investigating the individual and systems level (operational) factors that are associated with offender's participating in and successfully completing EQUIPS programs that they are referred to.

Overall, the profile of offenders allocated to EQUIPS was a mostly male cohort, with low education and most often from major cities or inner regional areas. Around a third of the cohort was Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a rate that is in line with the NSW Correctional population more broadly (Corrective Services Australia, 2019), and very few allocated offenders were CALD. Many offenders came from geographical regions associated with severe levels of relative disadvantage.

Allocated offenders also had histories of involvement with the criminal justice system, with two thirds having been previously incarcerated and almost 80% had more than one conviction prior to their index offence. The majority of allocated offenders referred through the custodial pathway had a parole period associated with their sentence. While most participants who had a custodial sentence were referred to their EQUIPS program before their EPRD (when they are eligible for parole), over a quarter of participants were referred after their EPRD had passed. This could have implications for these offenders' capacity to participate in and complete programs that they are referred to in the event that their actual release date is less clear or more variable. Lastly, offenders allocated to EQUIPS also had substantial assessed criminogenic need. In line with CSNSW policy, it was very rare for allocated offenders to have an assessed LSI-R risk below 'medium'. More offenders than not had the highest level of criminogenic need in relation to alcohol and drug use and leisure/recreation and to a slightly lesser extent, financial needs, showing the commonality of these issues overall. The commonality of alcohol and drug needs between those referred to different programs shows the high level of demand for EQUIPS Addictions and a possible need for inclusion of treatment and content for concurrent AOD issues within each of the other EQUIPS programs. The high prevalence of other demographic characteristics across offenders allocated to EQUIPS such as homelessness, financial security and low education levels shows that there are other recurrent issues and needs in the lives of people allocated to EQUIPS that may impact on their capacity to engage well in programs and rehabilitate. These additional needs may need to be addressed in a systematic way alongside EQUIPS to safeguard offenders in their treatment and reduce risk of recidivism.

While many of the demographic, sentencing and criminogenic variables described above were statistically different across allocations to each of the EQUIPS programs and between referral pathways (custody v community), few differences met the criteria of practical significance (i.e., were deemed practically meaningful). Differences that did meet practical significance show that sentencing characteristics, such as the type of index offence (e.g. sex offence or domestic violence offence), eligibility for parole and incarceration history had more bearing over program allocation and referral pathway than criminogenic or demographic characteristics. One exception to this was assessed risk level, a criminogenic characteristic that had a practically significant impact on referral pathway. Looking beyond practical significance, there was, however, a general trend of less severe risk profile of offenders allocated through the community referral pathway than through a custodial pathway, and for those allocated to EQUIPS Domestic Abuse and Foundation rather than Aggression and Addiction. This finding may indicate that EQUIPS Addiction and Aggression may attract a higher risk category of offender overall and should perhaps reflect a need for additional resources for these groups. This result should, however, be interpreted with caution as it could

show a confounding with an increased delivery of Domestic Abuse and Foundation within community settings, a setting which is known for a lower-risk cohort of offenders.

Implications of the findings for policy and practice

These findings provide a profile of offenders allocated to EQUIPS programs run in custodial and community settings. A comprehensive understanding of the profile of offenders participating in EQUIPS allows CSNSW to refine delivery of the program to target particular offender needs. These findings also highlight possible discrepancies between the offender cohort that EQUIPS aims to target and those who end up being allocated to EQUIPS in reality. For example, while findings showed that in most cases allocation to programs occurred in accordance with eligibility and exclusion criteria, there were definite areas for improvement including the large number of offenders who were referred and allocated to EQUIPS programs without having a recent LSI-R Risk Assessment. Current intervention pathways are in development through CSNSW that use automatic risk assessment tools instead of the LSI-R that may amend some of these issues.

Some findings that did not meet the threshold for practical significance may still have useful implications for policy and practice. Results indicated that Aggression and Addiction were more oriented towards being run through custodial referral pathways and to those who were in custody, whereas Domestic Abuse and Foundation were more oriented towards a community referral pathway with those who had community orders at referral. This suggests more effort may be needed to ensure streamlined and timely referral and allocations of these programs so that those who need these programs can be delivered prior to their EPRD. Results comparing cohorts allocated across different EQUIPS programs appeared to imply that offenders allocated to Foundation and Domestic Abuse tended to have lower criminogenic needs than those allocated to Addiction and Aggression, however this pattern did not hold on every occasion.

It is important to conduct further research to extend these findings beyond program allocation and examine factors associated with offender's program participation and completion. This question will be the focus of the subsequent reports in this series.

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