

Submission  
No 59

**INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY BASED SENTENCING  
OPTIONS FOR RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS AND  
DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS**

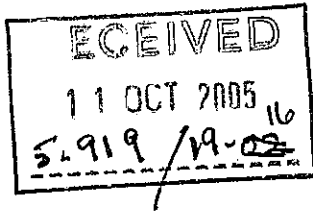
**Organisation:**

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**Date Received:** 11/10/2005

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## Minister for Corrections



04 OCT 2005

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Hon Christine Robertson MLC  
Committee Chair  
Standing Committee on Law and Justice  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Robertson

### **Inquiry into community based sentencing options for rural and remote areas and disadvantaged populations**

Thank you for your letters to the Attorney-General and my office dated 25 July 2005 seeking submissions into the above inquiry. I apologise for not being able to respond to your request by 25 August 2005.

The servicing of rural and remote regions can be challenging compared to the Melbourne Metropolitan area, although Victoria may experience fewer extremes of service disparity than states with a larger geographical area. Community Correctional Services in Victoria do not disadvantage offenders at the time of conducting suitability assessments for community based dispositions due to where they reside. Where there is a lack of public transport for offenders in remote areas, there is a requirement for staff to either conduct home visits or make alternative reporting arrangements such as a combination of home visits, phone calls and office interviews.

In relation to Indigenous offenders, Victoria has created a number of Indigenous Community Corrections Officer positions at locations with the highest proportion of Indigenous offenders, which are mainly in rural areas. In a culturally appropriate manner, these officers manage a small caseload and act as consultants to other staff in respect of the management of Indigenous offenders. They also aim to build networks with key Aboriginal organisations and leaders. Community Correctional Services make appropriate referrals and engage the community in dialogue about improving supervision order completion rates for Indigenous offenders. The Indigenous Community Corrections Officer initiative is currently undergoing evaluation, which is due for completion in November of this year.

One area which has, historically, been difficult to address in rural areas, is the provision of psychological services. Although referrals to psychologists in community agencies or in private practice are possible at some centres, community psychologists are not necessarily always well versed in forensic psychology. Furthermore, community agencies are not always enthusiastic about referrals from a correctional service, because offenders are often perceived as troublesome and disruptive.

In response to this issue, an in-house psychological service for offenders in the community has been developed over the past four years. For the most part, psychologists employed by the Department are able to cover most of the State by rostered travel throughout the regions they service. These psychologists have also had a key role in facilitating treatment programs, and in training Community Corrections Officers to co-facilitate the Cognitive Skills Program.

In relation to women offenders, the Government will later this year launch *Better Pathways: An Integrated Response to Women's Offending and Re-offending*. *Better Pathways* represents a collaborative approach to addressing the causes of women's offending, by providing a range of initiatives to improve the opportunities for women at risk of offending or re-offending and their families, resulting in better outcomes for individuals and the community as a whole.

In the 2005/06 State Budget, the Government provided \$25.5 million to tackle the growth in Victoria's female prisoner population, including \$18.3 million for programs to support women prisoners and offenders and \$7.2 million for improvements to women's prison facilities. The range of initiatives to be delivered under *Better Pathways* will focus on diverting women from prison custody and breaking the cycle of women's re-offending.

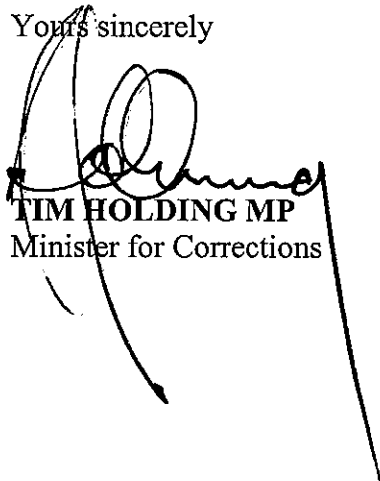
Victoria is still in the process of developing capacity in relation to better meeting the specific needs of young adults and offenders with disabilities. At this stage there are formative plans in all of these areas.

Another initiative that has shown potential is video conferencing. Most Community Correctional Centres in Victoria have video conference facilities. These can assist with the preparation of reports for Courts and the Adult Parole Board, especially where the offender is incarcerated at a distance from his/her place of normal residence, or proposed residential address on release from prison. This technology can help overcome the disadvantages caused by distance and the time required to travel for face to face interviews. Video conferencing has the potential to reduce the costs and travel time involved in staff training. If staff are able to be trained in the centres where they work, this can add to productivity and make country workloads less daunting.

Staff recruitment and retention can also be a challenge in remote and rural areas. In staff feedback surveys, comment is frequently received that there are fewer career path opportunities for staff that live in the country. Increasingly, however, it is possible to offer career opportunities which do not require an officer to move to a metropolitan area or large urban centre. In particular, a number of project management positions are now able to be offered to country staff, using the advantages of modern technology. Previously, it would have been impracticable to make these available to staff in more distant centres.

Should you require any further information on this issue, please contact Mr David Daley,  
Director Community Correctional Services, Corrections Victoria at  
[david.daley@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:david.daley@justice.vic.gov.au) or by telephone at 03-9627 6685.

Yours sincerely



**TIM HOLDING MP**  
Minister for Corrections