

# ***Administration of Parole***

**Tabled 10 February 2016**

The Auditor-General provides assurance to Parliament on the accountability and performance of the Victorian Public Sector. The Auditor-General conducts financial audits and performance audits, and reports on the results of these audits to Parliament.

On 10 February 2016, the Auditor-General tabled his performance audit report, *Administration of Parole*.

## Overview

- The audit examined whether parole is being administered effectively to improve community safety.
- The audit found:
  - improved administration of the parole system
  - but some challenges remain for agencies

The audit examined whether parole is being administered to achieve its intended outcomes—primarily improved community safety.

The audit found that the administration of the parole system has improved following significant investment and the implementation of the Parole System Reform Program (PSRP). However, there are still challenges for agencies.

## Background

- The primary objective of the parole system is community safety—alternative is straight release into the community.
- Past concerns about parole led to three reviews of the system since 2012—most recent was 2013 Callinan review.
- In response to the Callinan review, the Department of Justice & Regulation (DJR) received \$84.1 million over four years to implement the Parole System Reform Program (PSRP).

Parole is intended to provide prisoners with support and supervision while they complete their sentence and reintegrate into the community. Nearly all prisoners are released from prison at some stage, and the alternative to parole is straight release into the community without any support or supervision.

While the purpose of the parole system is to increase community safety, there will always be the risk that some parolees will commit further offences. This risk is managed through monitoring and supervision.

Parole controversies have led to three reviews of the system—most recently the 2013 review by former High Court Justice Ian Callinan, which raised significant issues and made 23 recommendations.

In response to the Callinan review the Department of Justice & Regulation (DJR) received \$84.1 million to implement PSRP which consisted of 13 separate projects, five of which were supporting ICT projects. Projects included:

- reforming the Adult Parole Board (APB)
- implementing a new risk assessment tool.

## Focus of this audit

4

### Key areas examined:

- Implementation of the PSRP
- Administration of the parole system
- DJR and Victoria Police support to the Adult Parole Board (APB)

### Audit scope

#### Did not include:

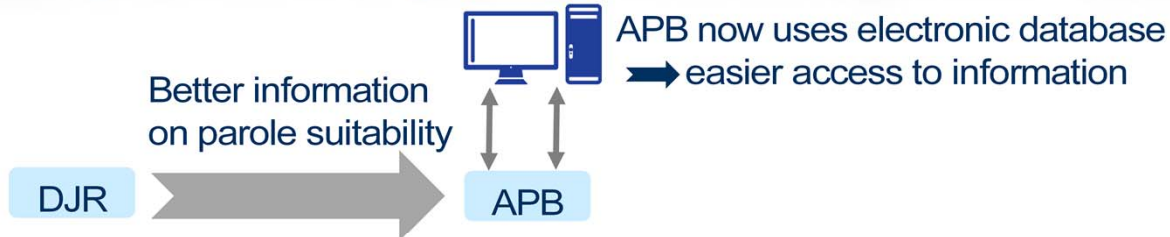
- APB decision-making
- youth or Commonwealth parole arrangements.

The audit looked at:

- whether implementation of parole reforms was comprehensive, timely and effective
- whether parole is being administered effectively to achieve intended outcomes
- whether the DJR and Victoria Police effectively support the APB to fulfil its statutory functions

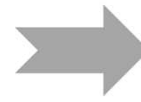
The scope included DJR, the APB and Victoria Police. However, it did not include the APB's decision-making or youth or Commonwealth parole arrangements.

## Preparation for parole



DJR needs to ensure:

- necessary support to apply
- programs are accessed in a timely way



APB parole consideration

**DJR needs to ensure there are enough in-prison programs and identify prisoners who need more support to apply for parole.**

Improvements to DJR and the APB's processes and systems mean that the APB is now better informed and supported to make sound decisions. Board caseloads have decreased, allowing more time for consideration.

Prisoners now have to apply for parole rather than automatic consideration by the APB. This means that the APB does not spend time considering parole for prisoners who do not want it.

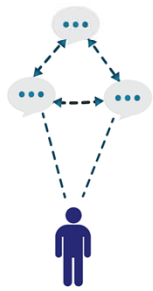
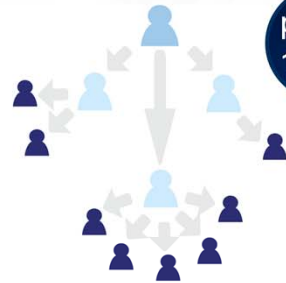
However, DJR needs to understand whether barriers are preventing some prisoners from applying for parole. Otherwise, some who are motivated and willing to go on parole may be unnecessarily prevented from doing so.

DJR has increased the number of offending behaviour programs and implemented internal targets that all serious violent or sex offenders receive offending behaviour program services.

However, its current monitoring does not allow it to determine whether prisoners are unable to access parole because of delays in accessing in-prison programs.

## Management of offenders on parole

Parole officers have appropriate guidance and training. However, centralised monitoring of case loads could be improved.



Inter-agency information sharing improved, but limited information sharing about parolees with community-based service providers.

Timeliness of access to some community programs not monitored.

Too early to determine the full impact of the PSRP on community safety, but there are some positive indications.

There is now a dedicated division responsible for supervising parolees, and DJR has provided training, guidance and support to ensure that parole officers have the capacity and capability to manage parolees. Parole officers also now have smaller caseloads.

However, DJR could better monitor caseloads centrally to reduce the risk of some parole officers becoming overloaded while others are underutilised.

Information sharing has improved between agencies. However, information-provision to service providers needs to be more consistent, comprehensive, and timely.

DJR should also better monitor access to community-based programs for parolees, in particular access to alcohol and other drug and mental health services.

It is still too early to determine the full impacts of the reforms on community safety. One positive indication is that since the PSRP began, fewer parolees have been convicted of serious violent or sex offences.

However, this is a lag indicator, and therefore the effects of changes made to the parole system will not become evident for several years.

Furthermore, it is possible that fewer high-risk offenders are being granted parole and are therefore being released straight into the community. The data does not pick up offences committed by these ex-prisoners.



## Management of offenders on parole—*continued*

7

pages  
15–28

Based on mortality rates in Victoria:

- Would expect there to be three parolee deaths per 1 000 per year



- In 2014 there were 18 deaths per 1 000



**DJR should improve its information sharing with community service providers and monitoring of case loads, program access and parolee mortality rates.**

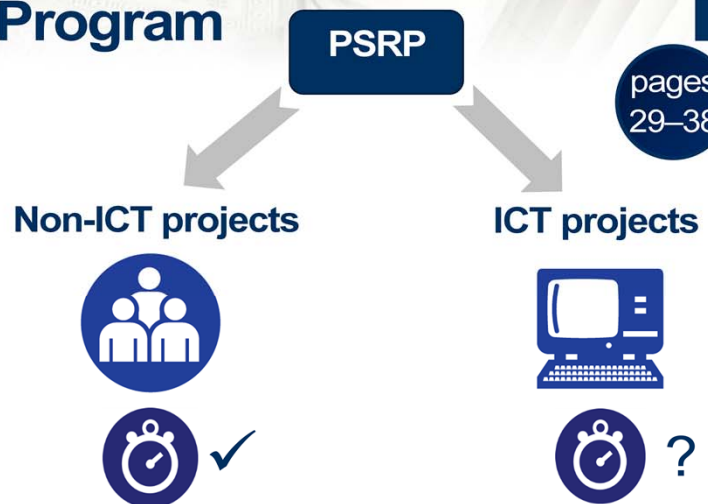
Better data and analysis is also necessary in regards to parolee mortality. Based on Victorian mortality rates, it would be expected that there would be approximately three deaths per 1 000 parolees per year.

However, in 2014, there were 18 deaths per 1 000. While only based on one year's data, this suggests that parolees in Victoria also have far higher mortality rates than the general population.

DJR should systematically analyse these rates and the causes of death to determine whether any preventative measures may be appropriate.

## Parole System Reform Program

PSRP was generally well planned and implemented, with some shortcomings.



**DJR needs to prioritise implementing an integrated offender information system.**

DJR appropriately responded to the Callinan review recommendations through the 13 projects that make up the PSRP.

All non-ICT projects were implemented on time. However, there were some issues with ICT projects in part because of DJR's complicated, outdated ICT systems.

Victoria is one of the only Australian states and territories without an integrated offender information system of some kind.

DJR should prioritise the implementation of an integrated system to reduce inefficiency, duplication of data and the risk of errors.



## Parole System Reform Program—*continued*

9

pages  
29–38

DJR's evaluation framework has the potential to assess outcomes. However, there is currently no cohesive performance monitoring in place.



**DJR needs to ensure that its evaluation framework leads to ongoing monitoring of outcomes.**

DJR is currently implementing its four-year evaluation of the PSRP.

However, further work is required to ensure that the proposed performance indicators capture all necessary information.

There is currently no comprehensive, cohesive performance monitoring in place. Consequently, it is not currently possible to measure the long-term benefits of the parole system or whether the reform program has improved community safety overall.

## Recommendations

10

		Accept
That the Department of Justice & Regulation:		
1.	monitors the number of prisoners not completing required offending behaviour programs beyond their earliest eligibility date for parole and ensures prisoners have sufficient access to programs	✓
2.	analyses prisoner groups not applying for parole and provides appropriate support	✓
3.	assesses and addresses barriers to the consistent provision of comprehensive information to community-based service providers	✓
4.	monitors parolee wait times for programs in the community and ensures there are enough offending behaviour programs to satisfy demand.	✓

The Auditor-General made eight recommendations.

Six relate—at least in part—to improved monitoring and analysis of data.

Two of these also recommend that DJR ensure there are a sufficient number of programs for both prisoners and parolees.

## Recommendations – *continued*

11

		Accept
That the Department of Justice & Regulation:		
5.	evaluates parolee mortality rates and causes at a systemic level and engages with the Coroner's Court to facilitate improved information sharing	✓
6.	implements an integrated offender information system as a priority	✓
7.	reviews the performance indicators in the PSRP evaluation framework to ensure that it leads to ongoing monitoring and reporting of outcomes	✓
8.	produces and monitors accurate budget data for the remaining PSRP funding.	✓

The remaining two require DJR to:

- consistently provide comprehensive information to community-based service providers in a timely way, and
- implement an integrated offender information system as a priority.

The department accepted all recommendations and has provided a detailed outline of how and when it intends to address each recommendation. This is contained in Appendix D of the report.

The Auditor-General will monitor progress against this plan.

## Overall message

12

**The parole system now operates better than in the past, however, there are still areas for improvement.**

The parole system now operates better than in the past. However, there are still some areas for improvement. In particular DJR needs to ensure that it:

- provides sufficient support for prisoners who want to access parole
- improves information sharing with community-based service providers
- better monitors case loads, program access and parolee mortality rates
- better monitors outcomes to continue to drive improvements
- implements an integrated offender information system.

## Relevant audits

13

- *Managing Offenders on Community Corrections Orders (2009)*

This slide shows other relevant VAGO audits.

## Contact details

14

For further information on this presentation please contact:

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

[p] 8601 7000

[w] [www.audit.vic.gov.au/contact\\_us.aspx](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/contact_us.aspx)

All of our reports are available on our website.

If you have any questions about this or other reports, or if you have anything else you would like to discuss with us including ideas for future audit topics, please call us on 03 8601 7000 or contact us via our website.