



## Office of the Auditor General Western Australia

# The Management of Offenders on Parole

Report 11 – November 2011

## Background

The Department of Corrective Services (DCS) is responsible for managing offenders in Western Australia. This includes offenders in the community on parole. Offender management includes supervising offenders, ensuring access to treatment programs which aid in rehabilitation and supporting prisoners to lead a law abiding lifestyle.

Parole provides an avenue for reintegrating and resocialising offenders into the community. A prisoner on parole is released from custody before the end of the maximum term of imprisonment imposed by the court to serve the remainder of their sentence in the community under supervision.

Advocates of parole believe it provides the best long term outcome for the community and offender. But, parole comes with risks. If parolees are not supervised and monitored appropriately, the community may be put at an increased risk.

The Prisoners Review Board (PRB) is responsible for making decisions on parole taking into consideration a number of factors with community safety of paramount importance. The PRB also sets parole conditions before release. These conditions aim to lower the risk that a parolee may reoffend both in the short and long term.

Our audit assessed whether DCS effectively manages parolees in the community. We focused on two questions:

- Does DCS have a suitable legislative and policy framework in place for managing offenders on parole?
- Do DCS's day to day practices ensure that offenders on parole are effectively managed in the community?

## Audit Conclusion

Parole has benefits and risks. It is a cost effective way to supervise some offenders, and can help reduce the long term risk of reoffending. However, it also creates a short term crime risk – a risk that can be lessened but not eliminated by good management of the parolee by DCS.

Achieving the best balance between these risks can be difficult. DCS has undertaken numerous reviews of how it manages parolees and then taken steps to improve its practices. This includes a new Enforcement Policy that more strictly requires parolees to comply with their parole conditions. Non-compliance invariably leads to cancellation of parole. This addresses short term risk by removing the opportunity for parolees to reoffend in the community but DCS does not yet know what impact this will have on long term reoffending rates.

DCS has also updated its policies to make supervision and reporting requirements more clear and so overcome a high level of inconsistent supervision of offenders. Inconsistent supervision can also increase the short term risk to the community. These actions have had some success though inconsistent supervision is still evident. Although DCS has taken a number of measures to communicate the new enforcement policy to staff, not all staff fully understand or apply the new policy.

Although the policy framework has been improved, some gaps remain in the monitoring it requires of parolees. In particular, there is limited monitoring of some parole conditions. Not adequately checking compliance with these parole conditions may enable a parolee to return to behaviours that initially contributed to their imprisonment.

## Key Findings

- DCS has improved its management of parolees but more improvements could be made. Issues identified in DCS internal professional standards reviews were still evident despite DCS taking a proactive approach to identify them.
- Because DCS is not monitoring all parole conditions some parolees may be breaching their orders without DCS knowing. The stricter enforcement of parole conditions reduces the incentive for parolees to self-report issues that could result in cancellation of their parole.
- Better monitoring of some parole conditions is needed. The use of drug tests and the monitoring of program attendance are inconsistent, reducing the effectiveness of both conditions. Not checking these conditions often enough may enable a parolee to return to high risk behaviours without DCS addressing the increased risk.
- The introduction of the Enforcement Policy by DCS has not yet led to consistent supervision of offenders. Despite efforts by DCS to communicate policy changes, understanding and application of the policy is variable.
- Changes by DCS to its Enforcement Policy has reduced the discretion of Community Corrections Officers to deal with breaches of parole conditions and requires all breaches to be reported to the PRB. It is not yet clear if this change will reduce the frequency that offenders breach parole or if the increased cancellation of parole will have a negative impact on long term reoffending rates.
- Parole numbers in Western Australia have fallen significantly. In the nearly five years up to October 2008, 92 per cent of prisoners who were eligible for parole had it granted by the Prisoner Review Board. Since September 2009 this has decreased to 21 per cent.
- There has been a significant increase in the average number of monthly parole cancellations. From March 2006 to November 2008 the average monthly cancellation of orders was 2.09 per 100 parolees. Since December 2008 this has nearly doubled to 3.96 per 100 parolees.
- The reduced granting of parole and increase in the cancellation of parole orders has increased the prison population by over 700. DCS has estimated that accommodating the increased prisoner population cost about \$115 950 per day in 2009-10.
- Western Australia has a lower rate of offenders on parole and a higher rate of offenders in prison, compared to the Australian average. In March 2011, the rate of offenders on parole was 27.6 per 100 000 individuals in Western Australia and 69.5 per 100 000 in Australia. In contrast the rate of imprisonment in Western Australia is 213.6 per 100 000, compared with the Australian average of 125.