
Ravenhall prison: Rehabilitating and reintegrating prisoners

Tabled 19 March 2020



Audit objective (and agencies)

This audit determined whether Corrections Victoria (CV), which is a business group of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and GEO, who privately operate Ravenhall prison, have set up a strategic and operational environment to rehabilitate offenders and reduce reoffending. We also examined if CV and GEO have effective performance and evaluation frameworks to evaluate Ravenhall's outcomes.

Key Messages

CV made significant changes to Ravenhall's prisoner population before it opened and in its first years of operation. These changes, which have seen Ravenhall take in high numbers of remand and short stay prisoners, have compromised its ability to trial new approaches to reduce reoffending. This is because Ravenhall's rehabilitation programs and some post-release supports were not designed for these prisoner cohorts.

Additionally, CV does not have an effective framework to measure Ravenhall's outcomes. In particular, Ravenhall's KPI for reducing reoffending cannot measure the relationship between Ravenhall's interventions and its prisoners' reoffending rates.

This is a significant missed opportunity for CV to learn about new approaches to reduce reoffending.

Context: Ravenhall

Ravenhall is Victoria's newest prison and began receiving prisoners in November 2017. It was designed to trial new rehabilitation methods to reduce reoffending. These methods include a suite of programs and supports to reduce reoffending and help prisoners reintegrate into the community.

GEO's contract with the state includes financially incentivised KPIs. In our audit, we focused on KPI 15, which measures Ravenhall's reintegration results, and KPI 16, which measures its prisoners' reoffending rates.

Findings: Contract changes

Ravenhall was initially designed to accommodate 1 000 sentenced male prisoners. However, CV changed its contract to accommodate growing prisoner numbers across the state.

These changes included increasing Ravenhall's capacity to 1 300 and introducing remand prisoners to its cohort, who now make up 52% of its population. CV has plans to further increase Ravenhall's total number of prisoners. Ravenhall also has a high proportion of short-stay prisoners.

As most of Ravenhall's prisoners are remand or short-stay, many are ineligible to participate in its criminogenic programs, which focus on reducing reoffending.

Findings: Performance, monitoring and evaluation

Ravenhall is the first Australian prison to have KPIs and payments linked to its reintegration and reoffending outcomes.

KPI 16, which measures reoffending rates, is not a suitable KPI for determining financial payments. This KPI is insensitive to how much influence Ravenhall's programs have on its prisoners' reoffending rates. It does not consider the amount of time a prisoner spends at Ravenhall compared to other Victorian prisons. It also cannot measure if a prisoner's reoffending outcome has been influenced by Ravenhall's programs or other external factors.

Beyond these KPIs, CV has no evaluation or research projects planned to examine the relationship between Ravenhall's interventions and its reoffending outcomes. This means that CV will not know what is or isn't working with Ravenhall's programs, and cannot apply learnings to the broader prison system.

Recommendations

We recommended that the Department of Justice and Community Safety:

1. review and revise KPIs 15 and 16
2. develop and implement an evaluation framework to assess Ravenhall's reoffending outcomes
3. advise government on the costs and benefits of Ravenhall's cohort mix.