



**KW/OOP**  
Keeping Women Out of Prison  
COALITION

# **Profile of women in prison in NSW**

Part A: A Snapshot

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March 2020

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## Note

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This is the report of a small research study commissioned by the Keeping Women out of Prison Coalition (KWOOP) **to establish a baseline profile** of women in prison in NSW drawn from available data. *Profile of Women in Prison Part A: A Snapshot* contains the data pertaining to women in prison as at August 2019.

The study also included the compilation of a comprehensive list of support services for women in NSW affected by the corrections system. The **census of services** is published as a separate document, *Profile of women in prison in NSW, Part B: Census of Services*, and can be read in conjunction with this report.

## Acknowledgements

This study and report was made possible by financial support from the KWOOP Fund of the Sydney Community Foundation.

The research study was undertaken by Lucy Phelan with assistance from Mindy Sotiri and Margaret Scott and support from Rosalind Strong, KWOOP convenor.

Thanks to Sarah Fogg for invaluable editorial assistance and to Audrey Mari for graphics and layout.

Staff from many services assisted with provision of data for the study for which we are grateful.

ISBN 978-0-6480639-4-0

# Keeping Women out of Prison Coalition NSW

The Keeping Women out of Prison (KWOOP) Coalition NSW comprises individuals and organisations: service providers, philanthropic and not for profit organisations and universities, and women with lived experience of the criminal justice system. The purpose of KWOOP is to influence systems, policy and practice in order to reduce the number of women in prison and to minimise the impacts on their families and children. The KWOOP Coalition NSW works collaboratively with policy and law makers.

[https://www.sydneycommunityfoundation.org.au/find\\_a\\_fund/kwoop-keeping-women-out-of-prison/](https://www.sydneycommunityfoundation.org.au/find_a_fund/kwoop-keeping-women-out-of-prison/)

## KWOOP Coalition NSW Vision

Better outcomes for women and children affected by the NSW criminal justice system

KWOOP is auspiced by the Sydney Community Foundation and members include the following:

- The Sydney Community Foundation (SCF) through its Keeping Women out of Prison (KWOOP), By My Side, and Sydney Women's Funds
- Community Restorative Centre (CRC) through The Miranda Project
- Dress for Success Sydney
- SHINE for Kids
- Women's Justice Network
- Zonta Club of Sydney
- UTS Australian Centre for Public and Population Health Research
- Corrective Services NSW
- Justice NSW
- Kathleen York House
- UNSW School of Social Sciences
- Individual academics and experts

## The need for research

The KWOOP Coalition identified a gap in the availability of consolidated evidence on the status of women in prison in NSW and the services available to them. In 2019 it commissioned this baseline study to address this gap.

The study report provides robust consolidated information including:

- **Current statistical data** on the number of women in custody and remand in NSW, the nature of their offences, length of terms, offending history, recidivism rates, as well as demographic data on their age, ethnicity, Indigenous status, family status, geographical area and other social and health statistics.
- **A comprehensive census of support services** for women in NSW who have been affected by the criminal justice system, details of the types of services provided and how they are funded.
- **A review of NSW Government policies and strategies** concerning women affected by the criminal justice system and available details of budget allocations and funding.

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# Glossary and abbreviations

**Table 1: Glossary of terms**

Term	Meaning
Indigenous	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
Non-Indigenous	Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander
Remand	Adults refused bail who are remanded in custody pending future court action. Includes persons granted bail but unable to meet conditions, persons refused police bail and remanded in custody in a gazetted correctional centre and persons on remand being managed as correctional patients under the Mental Health (Forensic Provisions) Act 1990.
Sentenced	Adults on whom the courts have imposed custodial sentence(s) for proven offence(s). This category includes persons returned to custody after breaching parole and forensic patients as per the Mental Health (Forensic Provisions) Act 1990 (that is, persons found unfit to be tried and persons found not guilty due to mental illness). Persons on remand <i>and</i> sentenced for one or more offences are deemed to have a legal status of sentenced.
Total women	All women (non-Indigenous, Indigenous and unknown).
Unknown	Indigenous status unknown

**Table 2: Abbreviations**

Term	Meaning
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
BHOP	Boarding House Outreach Project
BOCSAR	Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research
CESPHN	Central and Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network
CRC	Community Restorative Centre
CSNSW	Corrective Services NSW (since July 2019, a division of the Department of Communities and Justice)
ERS	Extended Reintegration Service

Term	Meaning
FACS	Family and Community Services (since July 2019, part of the Department of Communities and Justice)
FPI	Funded Partnership Initiative
GHSB	Going Home Staying Home
ITS	Initial Transitional Support
KWOOP	Keeping Women out of Prison Coalition
MSO	Most serious offence
NGOTGP	Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program
NPHS	Network Patient Health Survey Report
PHN	Primary Health Network
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services

## Note about language

### Women in prison

This report uses the terms ‘women in prison’, ‘women in the criminal justice system’, ‘women affected by the criminal justice system’, and ‘women at risk of criminal justice system involvement’ to describe the population who are the focus of the report. The report avoids the use of stigmatising or narrow terms such as ‘offenders’ or ‘criminals’. While many women involved in the justice system have committed offences, KWOOP believes this should not define the way in which this population are talked about, nor be the starting point for conversations about how to build pathways out of the justice system. As is apparent throughout this report, the experience of incarceration is only one part of an often complex set of circumstances faced by such women. The term ‘women’ in this report is inclusive of cisgender, transgender and other non-binary or gender fluid populations who are incarcerated in women’s prisons, or are incarcerated and identify as women.



## Reintegration and transition

The report uses the terms 'reintegration' and 'transition' to describe the process of women leaving prison and returning to live in the community. In reality, reintegration may not be an accurate description of the experience for many women as it assumes a level of community integration prior to incarceration. It also implies that there are communities that will welcome women when they return from prison, which is often not the case. However, in the absence of terms that describes the process more accurately, the report maintains their use.

## Diversion

The term 'diversion' is used in this report in its broadest sense, referring to diversion at any point in the justice system. As well as 'front end' judicial diversionary programs that divert women at or before the point of court, diversionary programs can exist at many other points in the justice system, including during post-release and reintegration phases. Many post-release programs are diversionary in that they work with women through complex court matters, provide advocacy and offer magistrates and judges community-based options that, wherever possible, provide alternative pathways to re-imprisonment.

## Recidivism

The way in which 'recidivism' is defined has a significant impact on the way in which diversion and post-release are understood and success is measured. Recidivism, at its most basic, refers to returning to a particular behaviour. In the context of criminal justice, recidivism can mean re-offending and/or returning to prison. The measures of recidivism used by Corrective Services NSW and the Department of Justice have varied over time. Recently, the commonly used measure of return to custody within a usually two-year post-release period, has been replaced under the 2019 Premier's Priorities by measures of re-offending in certain limited offence categories including proven personal, property or serious drug offence, in the 12 months following release. In this report, recidivism is used variously to describe both return to custody and re-offending.

# Executive Summary

Most of the solutions to women's offending lie outside prison walls – in treatment for addictions and mental health problems, protection from domestic violence and coercive relationships, secure housing, debt and financial management, employment, education and skills development.

Corston Report 2007<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Imprisonment carries with it significant social and economic costs, both short and long term. These costs are borne not just by imprisoned populations, but also by their children, families and communities as well as government and society.

While women are a small minority of the total prison population, there has been an alarming increase in their numbers over the last decade in NSW and, in particular, of Indigenous women. The incarceration of Indigenous women has been growing at a faster rate than any other demographic.

The Keeping Women out of Prison (KWOOP) Coalition advocates to reduce the number of women in prison and to minimise the impacts on their families and children. KWOOP commissioned this baseline study to provide a snapshot of the current profile of women in prison in NSW.

This report represents the data available on women in prison in NSW as at August 2019. It gives an overview of who this population is, why they are imprisoned and what services currently exist to support them. It aims to start a conversation about what we could, and should, be doing to challenge the unacceptably high rates of imprisonment of women in NSW.

There was a 33% increase in the number of women in prison between March 2013 (n=710) and June 2019 (n=946). This was **driven by a significant increase (66%) in the proportion of women on remand not a growth in crime.**

**33%** increase in the number of women in prison between March 2013 and June 2019

### Women in prison

Indigenous **32%**  
Non-Indigenous **68%**

**58%** of women in prison were either on remand or serving a short sentence of 12 months or less

**Figure 1: Numbers of women in prison in NSW June 2019**



*\*There are also n=9 women whose Indigenous status is unknown*

*Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019*

While 946 women were in prison as at 30 June 2019, the ‘flow-through’ population (the numbers released each year) is almost three times this number. **A total of 2760 women were released from NSW prisons during the year ending June 2019.**

There is little contention in the international literature and research about the immense disadvantage experienced by incarcerated populations that both contributes to, and is exacerbated by, imprisonment.<sup>2 3 4 5 6</sup> There is also little contention about the ineffectiveness of imprisonment as a strategy to control crime or address social disadvantage.<sup>7 8 9</sup> Much of the enormous cost and socially detrimental impact of imprisonment could be avoided by enhancing community-based services and interventions that divert people from prison and reduce re-offending.

While, clearly, judicial and legal frameworks and policing practices require exploration with regard to their impact on the significant increase in female incarceration (including an examination of bail legislation), there is also a pressing need to examine community-based options that can offer alternative pathways for women at risk of incarceration.

## Increasing incarceration of women since 2013

Since 2013, the rapid increase in numbers of women in prison has seen a:

- 66% increase in women on remand
- 17% increase in the sentenced female population.

Indigenous women are **over-represented in the sentenced population**, with a 49% increase since 2013 compared to a 6% increase among non-Indigenous women.

**49%** increase in sentencing of Indigenous women compared with **6%** increase for non-Indigenous women

Conversely, the **growth in the remand population was significantly higher among non-Indigenous women.**

There was a 99% increase in non-Indigenous women since 2013, compared to 35% among Indigenous women.

The length of sentence is on average 131 days (less than 5 months) for total women and almost 42 days shorter for Indigenous women at 89 days (less than 3 months). The picture is reversed for women on remand, where Indigenous women are likely to be held longer on remand (58 days) compared to total women (47 days).

The most common serious offences for women are:

- Offences against justice procedures (18%)
- Drug offences (16%)
- Acts intended to cause injury (16%).

## Profile of women in NSW prisons

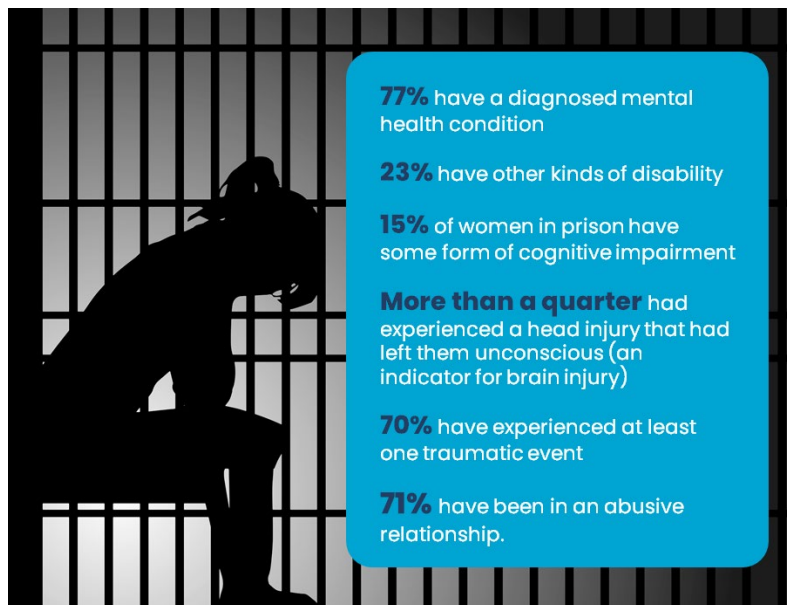
A snapshot of the women's prison population reveals that although Indigenous people make up only 2.9% of the NSW population, 32% of women in prison are Indigenous.

72% percent of women currently in prison have been imprisoned before. This is even higher for Indigenous women, 87% of whom have experienced prior incarceration.

The average age of women in prison at August 2019 was 35 years, 34 years for those on remand and 37 years for those with sentences.

Women with disabilities and mental health conditions are over-represented in NSW prisons together with those with experience of significant trauma and abusive relationships

**Figure 2: Profile of women in prison**



In addition, it is critical to note that 61% of women in NSW prisons are parents of one or more children below the age of 18. Among women in prison with children, many did not have their children living with them prior to imprisonment (40%). This is even higher for Indigenous women (50%).

**61%** of women in NSW prisons are parents of one or more children **below the age of 18**

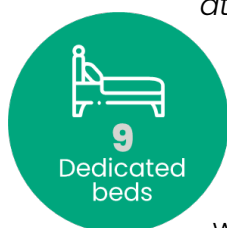
The long-term detrimental impacts of separation of children from their families due to parental imprisonment is well established with demonstrable negative effects on their life trajectories and greater likelihood of entry into juvenile and adult correctional systems.<sup>10</sup>

### Post-release homelessness and recidivism

Over 40% of women who have been sentenced to a period of imprisonment re-offend in the 12 months following their release. A key factor behind this is the significant proportion of women who do not have anywhere stable to live on release.

More than **one third of women** leave prison into either homelessness or housing instability

During 2019, of the 2760 women released from NSW prison, *at least* 900 were released into homelessness or unstable accommodation. There are, at most, only 9 dedicated beds available in NSW for women immediately after leaving prison. Five of these are short term beds and 4 are negotiated transitional placements (beds in transitional community housing properties that providers agree to use for women leaving custody if they also have community support).



## Support services available for women

In NSW, there are 8 specialist women’s services working with approximately 379 women at risk of re-imprisonment each year (Table 3 below). These organisations vary in their focus, structures and services. The range of services they may offer include case-management and support, accommodation support and provision, mentoring, employment support and parenting support.

At least **78%** of women leaving prison (**2,145**) are released from custody each year with no support services in place

A further estimated 236 women are able, on release from prison, to access non-gender specialist services. Most of these provide short term support and referral only.

At best, only 22% of women (615 individuals) receive any kind of service on release from prison.

**Table 3. Services available for women on release**

	Number/% of women
Flow-through (women released over 12 months to June 2019)	2760
Specialised services (8)	379
Non-gender specialised services	236
Total women receiving any services	615 (22%)
Women released with no support services	2,145 (78%)

The existing services report achieving positive outcomes, with many that provide long term support observing notably low recidivism rates. However, all services also report being under-resourced and unable to provide the level of service they observe is needed.

Just under \$4 million in funding from government and philanthropic sources is spent each year on these community-based services. **The cost per woman (for the 615 women able to access services), is approximately \$6,495 per annum. The cost of incarceration per annum is approximately \$110,000.<sup>11</sup>**

**Table 4. Total women’s services funding for women leaving prison**

Including funds from Family and Community Services, Corrective Services, Health and philanthropic sources).

	Funding	Numbers p/a	Per woman pa	Beds
Specialist women’s services	\$3,003,963	379	\$7918	8
Non-specialist services (women’s use of)	\$990,485	236	\$4,196	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,994,448</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>\$6,495</b>	<b>9</b>

There are no specific front-end, court diversionary programs for women in NSW. While court diversionary programs do exist, none of these are specifically for women and some are not open to women at all. Access to diversionary programs for women who are parents is also a significant gap in the service landscape in NSW.

There are no specific front-end, court diversionary programs for women in NSW.

## Conclusion and key areas for action

This baseline study paints a disturbing picture of the situation of women in prison in New South Wales. Of particular concern is the increasing rate of imprisonment of women and the high numbers of these women who are either on remand or in prison for short sentences and/or for non-violent crimes. The detrimental impacts of incarceration on women, and on children whose parents have been imprisoned, have enormous costs for these families and the broader community.

The over-representation of Indigenous women further reflects the unacceptably high levels of disadvantage and discrimination experienced by Indigenous people within criminal justice systems across Australian jurisdictions.

The direct economic costs of imprisonment are significant and increasing annually. It is highly probable that redirection of funding towards investment in the expansion of community-based services in order to prevent incarceration and provide diversionary options to reduce recidivism, would yield considerable savings to stretched government resources. Detailed exploration of the potential return on investment of such a strategy is needed.



This report identifies extraordinary levels of disadvantage and unmet need in the population of women incarcerated in NSW. The demographic data reveals extremely high levels of trauma, social and economic disadvantage, disability, homelessness and disconnection from communities and families. Yet the community sector response to this is fragmented and critically under-resourced, seriously constraining its ability to reduce the initial risk of incarceration or to adequately support women on release to avoid re-imprisonment. While there are some services achieving remarkable outcomes, there is no consistent state-wide pathway out of the justice system for most affected women.

The scope of this baseline study precluded investigation into the direct experiences and perspectives of women who are, or have been, incarcerated. Further qualitative research into affected women's life circumstances and experiences of imprisonment would provide invaluable additional insights into the situation for women and realistic options to reduce the impact of incarceration.

The multiple layers of disadvantage experienced by the majority of women in contact with the criminal justice system points to the need for a comprehensive whole of government approach with an emphasis on better resourcing of community-based services that enable diversion from imprisonment and prevention of recidivism.

The alarmingly high rate of imprisonment of Indigenous women warrants closer and **urgent** consideration of the contributing factors. Greater scrutiny and review of sentencing practices, bail conditions, the role of police, and community services that enable women to be diverted from the prison system is clearly called for.

The Premier of New South Wales's recent announcement that reducing recidivism in the prison population will be one of three 'Breaking the Cycle' priorities, is encouraging.<sup>12</sup> Although it is not yet clear what strategies will be developed to achieve this, it flags a clear recognition of the seriousness of this problem and may provide an opportunity for concerted action to reduce the imprisonment of women.

Breaking cycles of entrenched criminal justice system involvement requires asking questions about the approximately 2760 women released from prison annually. What happens each year when they walk out of the prison gates? What should be done to prevent women returning to custody? How might it be possible to divert women from the justice system? And what alternatives exist for women who are in prison primarily as a consequence of a lack of services in the community? This is particularly pressing for women who are imprisoned on remand, or who are imprisoned for crimes not considered serious enough to warrant prison sentences of more than 12 months.



## Key areas for action

The KWOOP Coalition proposes the following as a matter of urgency.

### A multi-stakeholder and whole of government taskforce

A targeted strategic taskforce should be established to consider and drive the development and implementation of a long-term multifaceted strategy to dramatically – and permanently – reduce women’s incarceration in NSW. This taskforce should include high level NSW Government leadership, appropriate representation from relevant community-based organisations and women with lived experience of incarceration. The taskforce should be time-limited and have clear reporting requirements on strategy implementation.

The Strategy should incorporate the following key elements:

- Significant investment in community-based services, supports and housing for vulnerable women at risk of criminal justice system involvement. Such services should include support with mental health, disability, drug and alcohol use, domestic violence and legal matters, as well as addressing homelessness and unstable accommodation.
- Increased access to effective diversionary programs for women at risk of criminal justice system involvement, especially for women who are parents.
- Programs that enable women who are parents to retain contact with their children while incarcerated.
- A coordinated, state-wide, funded, community-based response for incarcerated women leaving custody to reduce rates of recidivism and to support successful integration into the community.
- Specific initiatives for Indigenous women to reduce rates of imprisonment.
- A coordinated approach to the removal of the restrictions and discrimination facing women with criminal records or histories of incarceration in accessing relevant mainstream services such as drug and alcohol services, domestic violence support, housing and employment services.

### Further research in key areas:

- Research into the perspectives and experience of women who have been incarcerated to provide further insights into the factors leading to imprisonment and the types of supports and interventions that could reduce re-offending.
- Investigation of the specific factors contributing to the high levels of incarceration of Indigenous women and the most appropriate strategies to address these.
- Investigation of the factors contributing to the high levels of women on remand and exploration of strategies to reduce these.
- Financial modelling of the relative costs of imprisonment versus community-based diversion programs. Detailed investigation into potential savings to be made by re-directing government funds from prisons into expanded community-based services aiming to reduce women’s involvement in the correctional system.

## Postscript

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At the time of finalising the writing of the KWOOP Coalition report in February 2020, the Inspector of Custodial Services in NSW also released a report highlighting the unique challenges faced by women on remand in NSW.<sup>13</sup>The findings in the Inspector of Custodial Service report are closely aligned to the key issues identified by KWOOP, and together these reports provide a compelling argument to reduce the unnecessarily high numbers of women in prison in NSW.

'Short' sentences can still be long enough for women to lose their housing, family ties (including care of children), treatment and employment and have prolonged negative effects on a woman's capacity to re-establish their lives on release. The potentially damaging effect of short sentences was described in the recent ALRC report as 'a cycle of ongoing disruption – caused partly by repeated low-level offending and short terms of incarceration that can exacerbate existing disadvantage and make it extremely difficult for a female offender to reintegrate into her community.' p132

"Many women cycle in and out of remand over time. Whilst length of stay on remand can be short, 'the social as well as the financial costs of these short-term remands can be very high.' As such, there is a need to ensure that diversionary programs are available for women that can help them avoid short and disruptive periods of incarceration. Women who are Aboriginal, or who have cognitive impairments or intellectual disability, should be provided with specialised diversion programs to prevent their incarceration."p17

# Introduction

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## Keeping Women out of Prison coalition (KWOOP)

The KWOOP Coalition was established in 2013 to focus on some of the key systemic failures and major human rights issues impacting women in NSW prisons. Under the leadership of the Sydney Community Foundation, the Coalition members resolved to work together to make the case for and develop strategies to reduce the number of women in prison and to lessen the impact of women's custodial sentences on them, their families and children.

## The need for research

The KWOOP Coalition identified a gap in the availability of consolidated evidence on the status of women in prison in NSW and the services available to them. In 2019 it commissioned this baseline study to address this gap.

The study report provides robust consolidated information including:

- **Current statistical data** on the number of women in custody and remand in NSW, the nature of their offences, length of terms, offending history, recidivism rates, as well as demographic data on their age, ethnicity, Indigenous status, family status, geographical area and other social and health statistics.
- **A comprehensive census of support services** for women in NSW who have been affected by the criminal justice system, details of the types of services provided and how they are funded.
- **A review of NSW Government policies and strategies** concerning women affected by the criminal justice system and available details of budget allocations and funding.

## Methodology

The methodology was primarily desktop research drawing on publicly available information and statistics, as well as email and telephone contact with service providers to gain further detail about their services. The specific methodology for each of the components was as follows:

- Statistics
  - Compilation and analysis of the most recent available data from the:
    - Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)
    - Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)
    - Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
    - The NSW Health Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JHFMHN)
- Statistics on Indigenous women have been provided for all variables wherever possible.

- Census of services
  - Compilation of a comprehensive list of support services for women in NSW affected by the corrections system. Information on the nature and scope of each of these services was sought by way of internet searches, telephone calls and emails.
- Government policy
  - Review of NSW Government strategies and funding concerning women affected by the corrections system, drawing on publicly available government information and two in-depth interviews with stakeholders (service provider and Government).

## Limitations of this study

The scope of this limited study was constrained by available resources and precluded undertaking qualitative research with women with the direct experience of incarceration. It is highly recommended that further research is done to complement this study and provide deeper insights into women's lived experience.

## About this report

This report represents the most recent data available on women in prison in NSW as at August 2019.

# Context for this Report

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## Framing and rationale

Preventing imprisonment and breaking entrenched cycles of recidivism among high-risk populations requires an understanding of the underlying social and structural issues that contribute to incarceration and recidivism.

This report is intended to provide a snapshot of the circumstances of women in prison, women at risk of imprisonment and women seeking to move away from criminal justice system involvement in NSW. There is a particular need to understand the gender specific demographics of women in prison in NSW in order to frame the level and intensity of support required by this population post-release to avoid recidivism.

There is a particular need to understand the gender specific demographics of women in prison in NSW in order to frame the level and intensity of support required by this population post-release to avoid recidivism.

There exists a considerable body of evidence exploring the specific needs of women in custody, alongside compelling research that outlines the demographic realities for women who are sent to prison.<sup>14 15 16 17</sup> This report seeks to build on this evidence in order to start a very practical conversation about how to build pathways out of the justice system for affected women.

There is now overwhelming evidence that, throughout Australia, women who are imprisoned are predominantly poor, have survived trauma – often in the form of gendered violence – have mental illness, cognitive impairment, come from communities of extreme social and economic disadvantage and are disproportionately Indigenous.

There is notable research into the intergenerational impact of imprisonment, particularly for families where children are removed as a consequence of parental incarceration.<sup>18</sup> Research into the 'care to custody' trajectory reveals the manner in which children who experience out of home care are much more likely to go on to experience juvenile and adult incarceration themselves.

The high proportion of women in prison who are parents (outlined further in this report) requires responses that will interrupt this cycle of imprisonment and child-removal. The pains of imprisonment extend well beyond deprivation of liberty. Separation from children remains the greatest hardship of imprisonment for women who are parents.<sup>19</sup>

## Links with homelessness

There is clear evidence that homelessness increases the risk of criminal justice system involvement and, conversely, that imprisonment increases the likelihood of homelessness.<sup>20 21</sup> The reasons for the relationship between homelessness and imprisonment are complex. They include the higher levels of surveillance experienced by people who live outside a conventional home and therefore greater likelihood of coming to the attention of the criminal justice system. There is also overlap between common causes of homelessness and of offending. Problematic drug and alcohol use and mental illness, for example, are risk factors for both homelessness and offending.<sup>22</sup>

There is a considerable body of 'housing first' literature that notes the way in which safe, secure and permanent accommodation allows people from chronically disadvantaged backgrounds to establish a firm base from which to address their disadvantage, including creating opportunities for education and employment.<sup>23</sup> International data highlights the success of housing first programs in supporting chronically homeless people and/or vulnerable populations to sustain tenancies (and achieve multiple other positive outcomes).<sup>24</sup> A number of Australian housing first projects also have demonstrated remarkably positive results<sup>25</sup> although the scale of such approaches in Australia is much smaller than in Europe or the US.<sup>26</sup> In Europe, where housing first approaches have been operating for close to two decades, there is a solid research base showing significant positive outcomes for clients in terms of sustained tenancies and improvements in health and well-being measures. Rates of tenancies sustained for more than 12 months across a number of large-scale housing first projects, range from 80% to 98%.<sup>27</sup>

## Best practice principles for reintegration

There is recognition in the practice research that the post-release period, particularly the first three months, is a time of high risk for re-offending, relapse into problematic drug and alcohol use (and associated violent behaviour) as well as above average risk of mortality through suicide and drug overdose.<sup>28 29 30</sup> For women it is an extremely high risk period for return to violent living situations.<sup>31</sup> These risks are exacerbated for women who are homeless, have mental illness and/or cognitive impairment.<sup>32 33</sup> There is also strong evidence that social exclusion exacerbates the challenges faced by women on release.<sup>34 35</sup>

While there is scope for considerable additional research in this space, compelling research has identified key best practice principles underlying successful reintegration.<sup>36</sup>

1. **Reintegration framed outside of the lens of rehabilitation.** This means creating and facilitating pathways for people leaving prison that are not explicitly focused on addressing offending behaviour, but rather on the creation of an identity outside the criminal justice system.<sup>37</sup>
2. **Service delivery incorporating individual and systemic advocacy.** Service delivery must include a significant advocacy component that addresses

structural barriers faced by individuals (such as poor access to housing, employment, education, health and social security benefits), and champions systemic change when required (for instance in the case of discriminatory employment practices).<sup>38</sup>

3. **Pre-release engagement.** This means meeting and working with people prior to their release in order to build the engagement necessary to sustain the casework relationship, build trust and plan for re-entry into the community.<sup>39 40 41</sup>
4. **Holistic, relational and long-term casework models.** People with long histories of trauma and sometimes 'referral fatigue', require long-term support in order to build engagement and trust. Long-term support also allows people the opportunity to develop the skills required to navigate frequently hostile or unwieldy service systems.<sup>42 43 44</sup>
5. **Community-based outreach.** Services that work with people with long histories of criminal justice system involvement need to operate outside the criminal justice system and be based in communities in which people are living.<sup>45</sup>
6. **Housing first approaches** (and in some jurisdictions, 'employment first' approaches). Support must be concrete and address fundamentals such as housing and/or employment. Most people require a solid base from which they can try and make the changes required to stay out of prison.<sup>46</sup>
7. **Genuine collaboration with people with lived experience of incarceration** at all levels of program delivery. The expertise of people who have themselves been to prison is critical in both the design and the delivery of community-based reintegration services.<sup>47</sup>

## Statistics on women in prison in NSW

This section provides a summary and analysis of key statistics on women in prison in NSW. The primary sources are:

- BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019
- CSNSW, New South Wales Inmate Census 2017
- CSNSW, Data on parenting status, sourced directly from CSNSW
- ABS, Prisoners in Australia, 2018
- ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, and
- Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, Network Patient Health Survey Report (NPHS) 2015, published 2017.

Where possible this data has been provided for total women, non-Indigenous women and Indigenous women, as well as broken down by women with a sentence and women on remand.

### Number of women in prison, sentenced and on remand

#### Overview

At the end of the June 2019 there were 946 women in prison in NSW, comprising 7% of the total prison population in NSW (13,403). There were 392 (41%) women on remand and 554 (59%) women with a sentence.

Of the total number of women in prison 639 (68%) were non-Indigenous and 298 (32%) were Indigenous. This is a significant over-representation given that Indigenous people make up only 2.9% of the NSW population.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 3: Numbers of women in prison in NSW June 2019**



\*There are also n=9 women whose Indigenous status is unknown  
Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019



**Table 5: Number of women in prison by indigeneity, on remand and with a sentence in NSW June 2019**

	Total	Remand	Sentenced
Total women	946	392 (41%)	554 (59%)
Indigenous women	298	116 (39%)	182 (61%)
Non-Indigenous women (excluding Indigenous status unknown)	636	266 (42%)	370 (58%)

Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

## National context

ABS data from the March quarter 2019 shows that in the national context, NSW held the largest number of women in prison, at 1001 women.

NSW has the fourth highest rate of imprisonment of women at 32 per 100,000 population. The Northern Territory has the highest rate by a large degree at 130 per 100,000 population, followed by Western Australia at 74 and Queensland at 45.

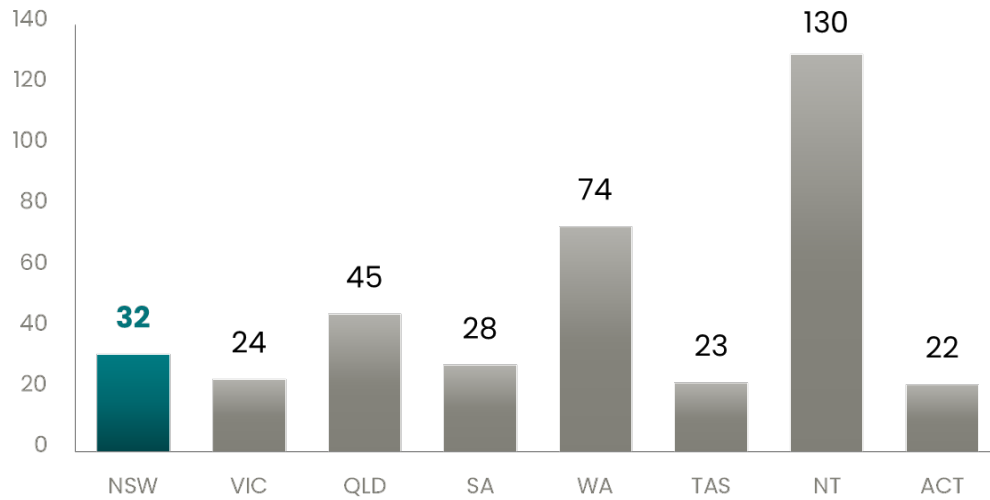
In all States and Territories, rates of imprisonment of Indigenous women are significantly higher compared to rates for total women (see Figure 3). In NSW the rate of imprisonment of Indigenous women is 460 per 100,000 population which is comparable to Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. The highest rate of imprisonment of Indigenous women is in Western Australia at 1008 per 100,000.

**Table 6: Average daily number (March Quarter 2019) of women in full-time custody by State and Australia total**

Average daily number (March Qtr 2019)	NSW	Vic.	Qld	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Aust. Total
Total Women	1,001	600	888	192	737	46	114	38	3,617
	28%	17%	25%	5%	20%	1%	3%	1%	100%
Indigenous women	334	77	319	63	332	12	97	14	1,248
	27%	6%	26%	5%	27%	1%	8%	1%	100%

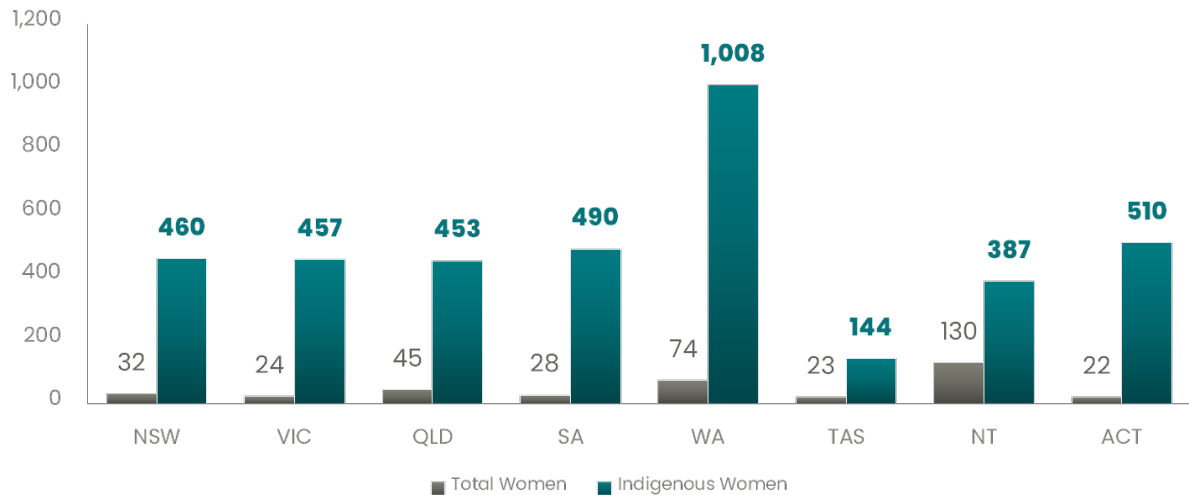
Source: ABS, Corrective Services, Australia, March Quarter 2019

**Figure 4: Rate per 100,000 population of women in prison (sentenced and remand) by State or Territory**



Source: ABS, Corrective Services, Australia, March Quarter 2019

**Figure 5: Rate per 100,000 population of total women and Indigenous women in prison (sentenced and remand) by State**



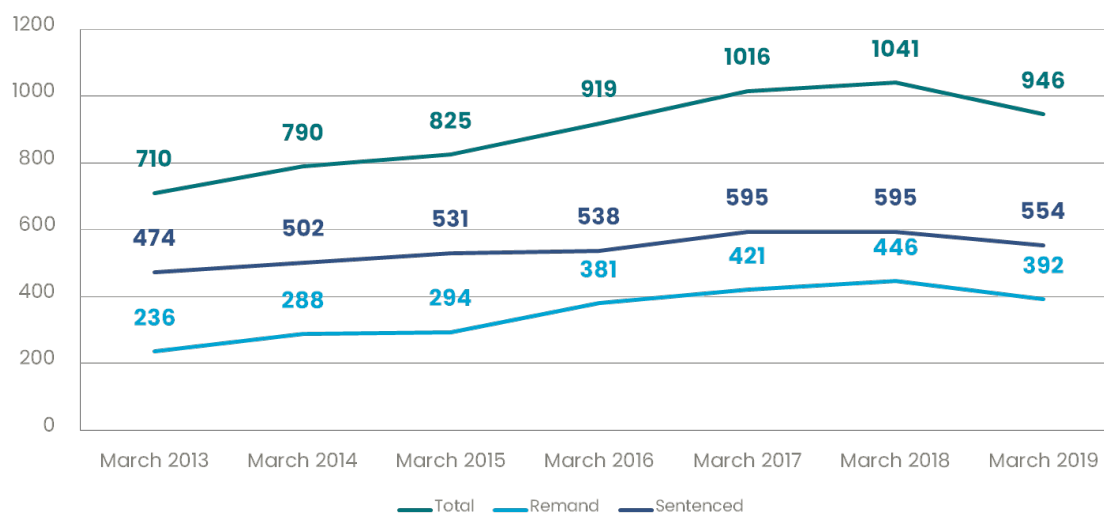
Source: ABS, Corrective Services, Australia, March Quarter 2019

## Change in number of women in prison in NSW since 2013

The overall trend has been a steady increase the number of women in prison in NSW since March 2013. There were 710 women in prison in NSW in March 2013 and 946 women in prison in NSW in June 2019, an increase of 236 women. Within this time period, the number of women in prison peaked in June 2018 at 1067 and has subsequently declined to 946 in June 2019. The increase represents an overall percentage increase of 33%. This growth was even higher for Indigenous women (43%) compared to non-Indigenous women (31%).

This upward trend in the number of women in NSW prisons has been driven by a steady increase in the number of women on remand, which peaked in February 2018 at 450.

**Figure 6: Number of women in prison in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019 by total, remand and sentenced**



Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

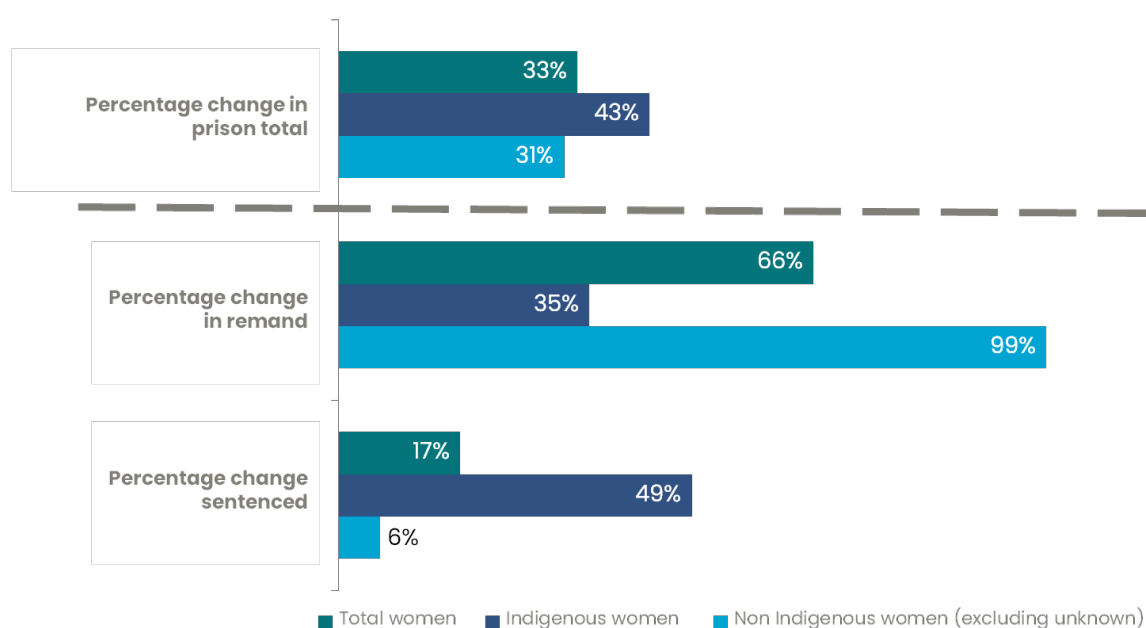
There was a 66% increase in women on remand during this period. This was significantly higher among non-Indigenous women among whom there was a 99% increase, compared to 35% among Indigenous women.

**66%** increase  
in women on  
remand between  
**March 2013 and  
June 2019**

For women who received a sentence the picture is different. The overall growth in the sentenced female population was 17% and is driven by a significantly higher growth in number of Indigenous women (49% increase) as compared to non-Indigenous women (6% increase).

Higher growth in number of Indigenous women (49% increase)

**Figure 7: Change in number of women in prison in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019, by total women, Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women**



Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

**Table 7: Change in number of women in prison in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019, by total women, Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women**

Prison population (sentenced and on remand)	Mar-2013	Jun-2019	Number change	Percentage change
Total women	710	946	+236	+33%
Indigenous women	208	298	+90	+43%
Non-Indigenous women (excluding unknown)	484	636	+152	+31%

Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

**Table 8: Change in number of women in prison on remand in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019, by total women, Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women**

Prison population (remand only)	Mar-2013	Jun-2019	Number change	Percentage change
Total women	236	392	+156	+66%
Indigenous women	86	116	+30	+35%
Non-Indigenous women (excluding unknown)	134	266	+132	+99%

Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

**Table 9: Change in number of women in prison with a sentence in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019, by total women, Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women**

Prison population (sentenced only)	Mar-2013	Jun-2019	Number change	Percentage change
Total women	474	554	+80	+17%
Indigenous women	122	182	+60	+49%
Non-Indigenous women (excluding unknown)	350	370	+20	+6%

Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

## The flow of women in and out of prison

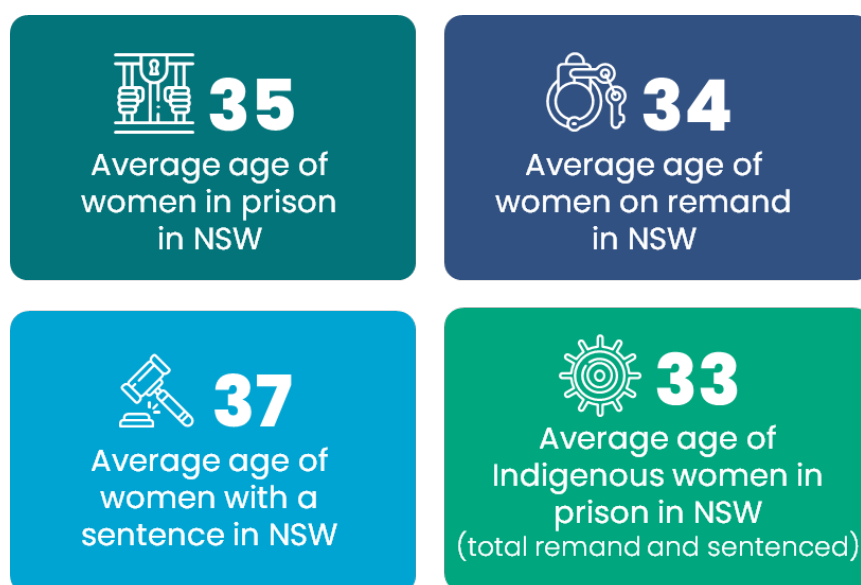
The flow of women describes the number of women entering and exiting prison within a given period. The number of women received into NSW prisons between July 2018 and June 2019 was 2639 and the number discharged in the same time period was 2760. Thus, there is a much larger number of women churning in and out of prison during a given period than are in prison at the end of a given month.

Data on the reasons for discharge from prison show the high number of women in prison without a sentence. In the year ending June 2019 only 40% exited because they finished their sentence or were given parole. Thirty percent were released on bail and another 30% were released for other reasons.<sup>49</sup>

## Age profile

The most recent data (June 2019) indicates that the average age of women in prison in NSW is 35 years of age. For those on remand it is slightly lower at 34 years. For those with a sentence the average age is slightly higher at 37 years. The average age of Indigenous women is 33, which is consistent across remand and sentenced populations.

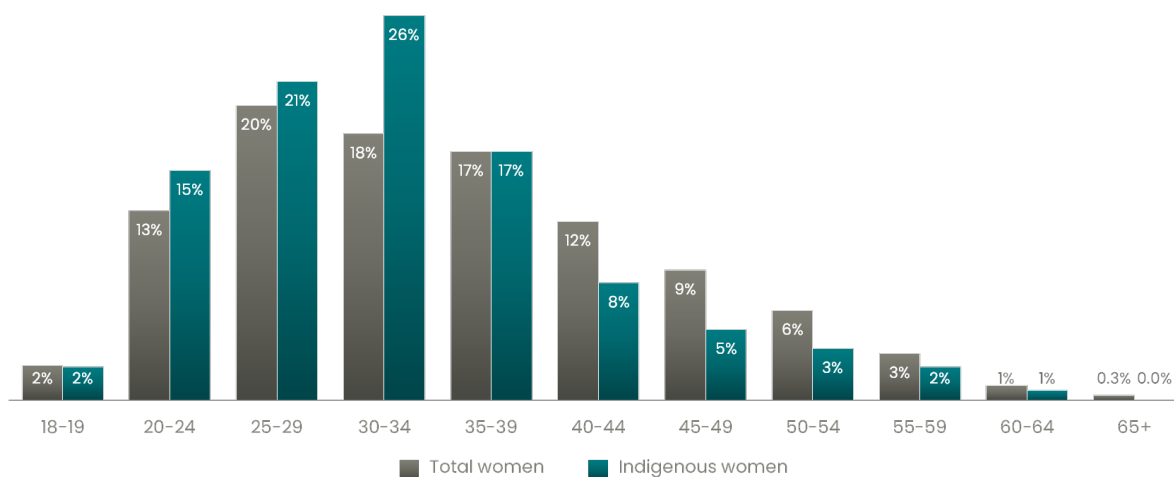
**Figure 8: Average age of women in prison in NSW as of June 2019, by legal status**



Source: BOCSAR, *New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019*

The Corrective Services Inmate Census (2017) provides an age breakdown of women in prison. As can be seen in the figure below the largest proportion of women in prison are aged between 25 and 29 years (20%), followed by 30 to 34 years of age (18%) and 35 to 39 years of age (17%). The age profile of Indigenous women is younger compared to the total population. Sixty-five percent of Indigenous women are under 35 years, compared to 52% for the total.

**Figure 9: Age breakdown of women in prison in NSW 2017, by total and Indigenous**



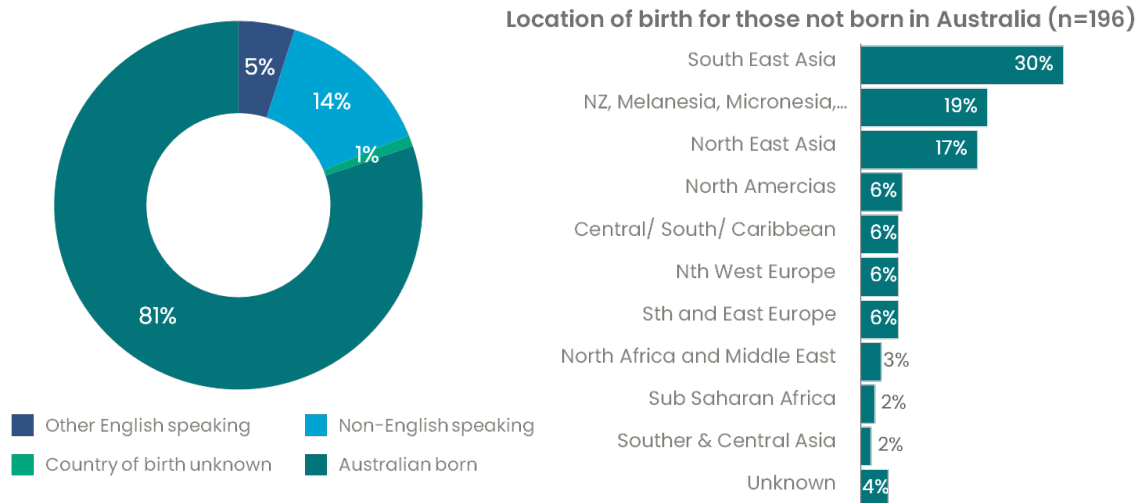
Source: Corrective Services NSW, NSW Inmate Census 2017  
Base size: Total women n=1007, Indigenous women n=319

## Ethnicity

Eighty-one percent of women in prison in NSW were born in Australia, 14% in a non-English speaking country and 5% in an English-speaking country. All Indigenous women were born in Australia.

Among those not born in Australia, 30% come from South East Asia (mainly Vietnam), 19% from New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, and 17% from North East Asia.

**Figure 10: Country of birth of women in prison in NSW 2017**



Source: Corrective Services NSW, NSW Inmate Census 2017  
Base size: Total women n=1007, Women not born in Australia n=196

## Nature of most serious offence

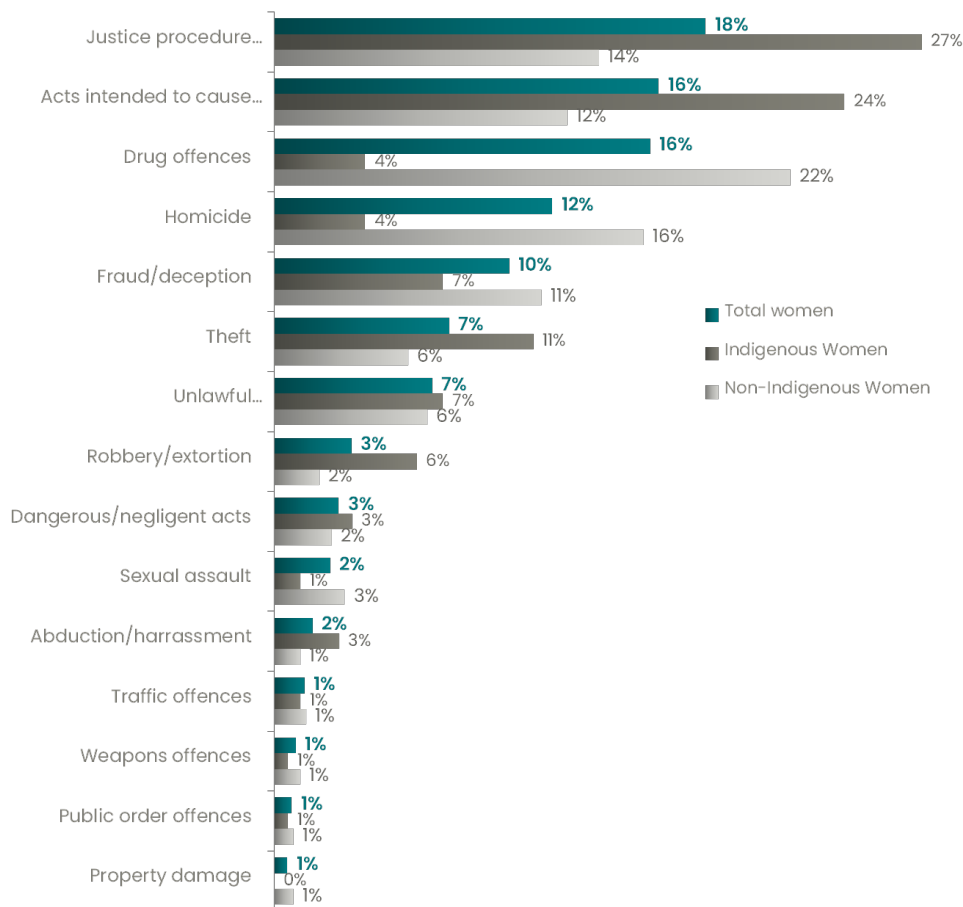
### Sentenced

The top most serious offence (MSO) for total women with a sentence in NSW was 'justice procedure offences' (18%). This category includes breach of an apprehended violence order (AVO), escape from custody, breach of bail conditions, failure to appear and resist and/or hinder an officer. Justice procedure offences were significantly higher for Indigenous women as compared to non-Indigenous women (27% and 14% respectively).

The top most serious offence (MSO) for total women with a sentence in NSW were 'justice procedure offences' **(18%)**

The next most common MSO was 'acts intended to cause injury' at 16% for total women. Again, this was significantly higher for Indigenous women as compared to non-Indigenous women (24% and 12% respectively). A similar proportion of total women had been sentenced for 'drug offences' (16%). This was significantly higher among non-Indigenous women as compared to Indigenous women (22% and 4% respectively).

**Figure 11: Top 10 most serious offence of women with a sentence in NSW June 2019**



Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019



## Length of terms

The average length of stay for women from their date of reception on remand to date of discharge after serving their sentence is 268 days (8.9 months) and slightly shorter for Indigenous women at 247 days (8.2 months).

The length of sentence is on average 131 days (4.36 months) for total women but almost 42 days shorter for Indigenous women at 89 days (2.96 months). The converse is true for women on remand, among whom Indigenous women are likely to be held longer (58 days) compared to total women (47 days).

**Figure 12: Average length of stay for women discharged from custody each quarter**



Source: BOCSAR, New South Wales Custody Statistics Quarterly Update June 2019

Note: Length of Stay for Remand to Sentenced Custody is from the date of reception on remand to date of discharge after serving sentence.

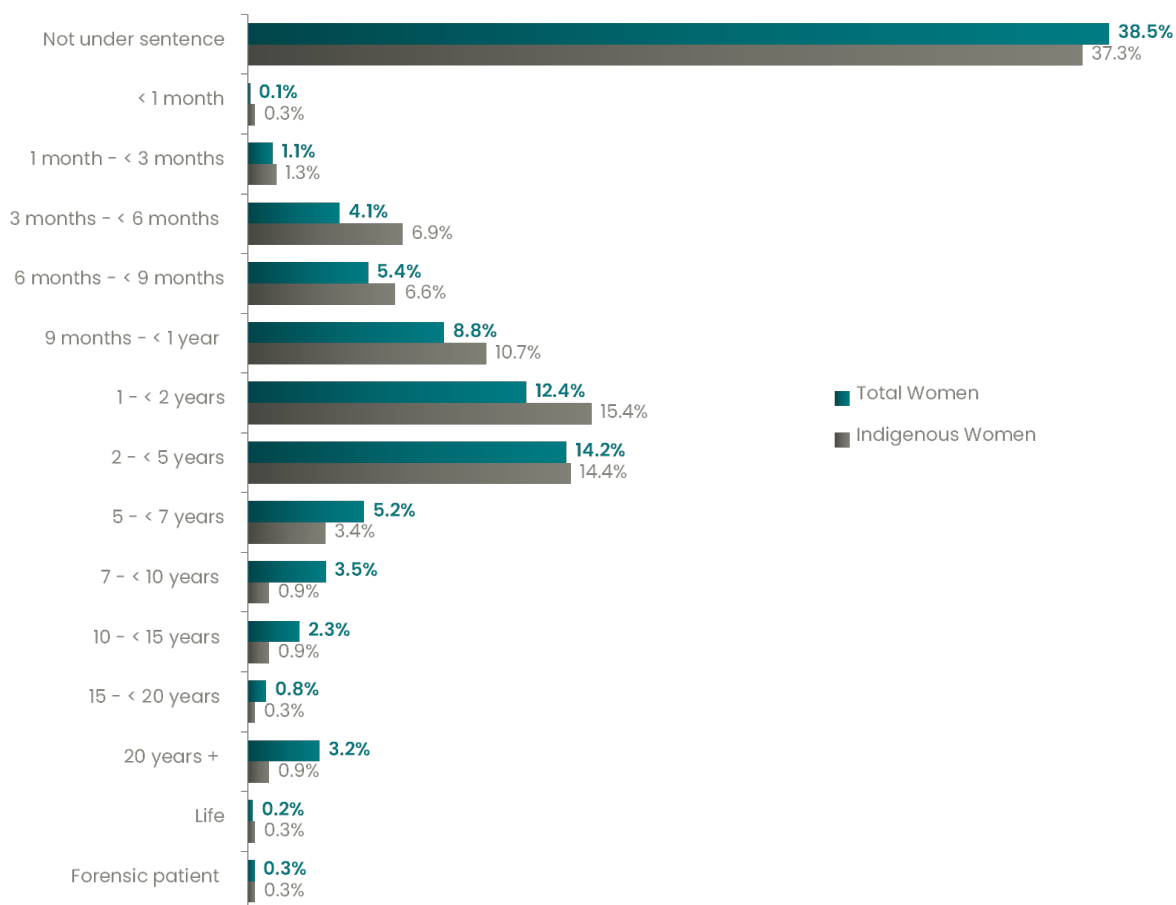
The breakdown of sentence length and type in the 2017 NSW Inmate Census (available at the time of writing) showed that 58% of women in prison were either on remand (38.5%) or serving sentences of under 12 months (19.5%). A further 12% of women were serving sentences of between 1 and 2 years, and 14% were serving between 2 and 5 years.

More recent 2018 data provided by CSNSW<sup>50</sup> focusing on the break-down of sentenced women reveals that as a proportion of the sentenced population, almost a quarter (23%) of all sentenced women are serving sentences of under 12 months. This is however a static snapshot only and does not reflect the higher proportion of women serving short sentences in the flow-through population.

High proportions of women in prison are either not under a sentence or are under a short sentence of less than one year. Almost six in ten (58%) women in prison (582 at the time of the 2017 census) were either on remand or serving a short sentence.

Almost **6 in 10** women in prison were either on remand or serving a short sentence

**Figure 13: Length of aggregate sentence for women in prison in NSW**



Source: Corrective Services NSW, NSW Inmate Census 2017  
 Base size: Total women n=1007, Indigenous women n=319

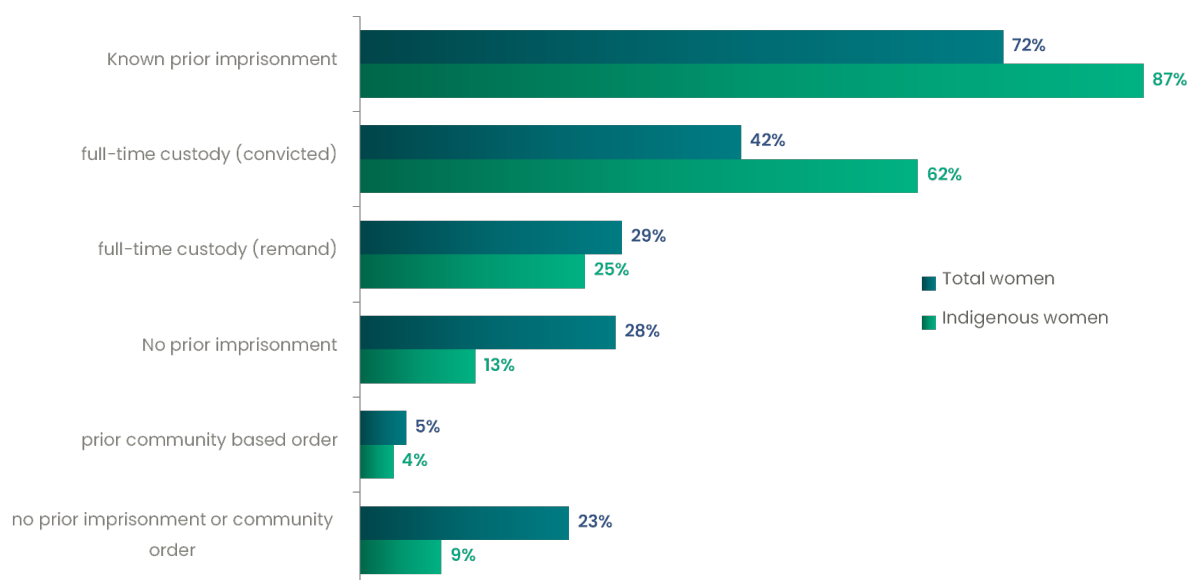
## Offending history/custodial sentences

A high proportion, almost three-quarters (72%), of women in prison have been in prison before. This figure is higher among Indigenous women at 87%.

The 72% of women who have been in prison before comprises 42% who were convicted and 29% on remand. The 87% of Indigenous women who have been in prison before comprises 62% convicted and 25% on remand.

The 28% of women with no prior imprisonment comprise 5% who have had a previous community order and 23% with no previous order. A smaller proportion of Indigenous women (13%), have never been to prison before with 4% having had a previous community-based order.

**Figure 14: Prior imprisonment as an adult among women in prison in NSW**



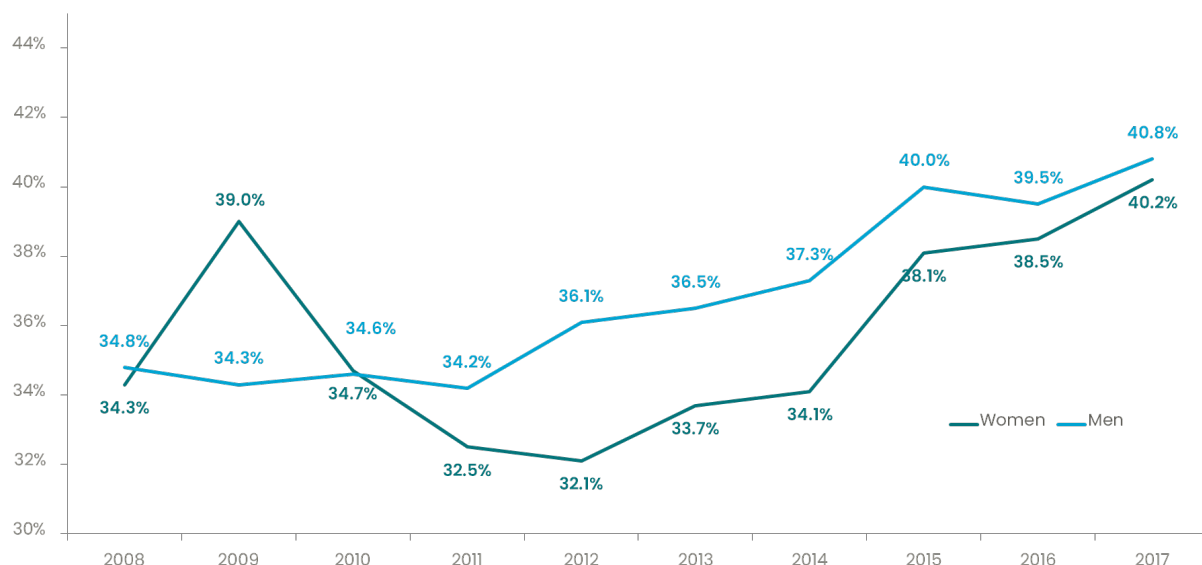
Source: Corrective Services NSW, NSW Inmate Census 2017  
Base size: Total women n=1007, Indigenous women n=319

## Recidivism rates

The most recent available re-offending statistics from the BOCSAR indicate that, in 2017, 40.2% of women in prison under a sentence re-offended within 12 months of being discharged from prison. This is fractionally less than the re-offending rate for men at 40.8%.

Time-series data since 2008 indicate that there has been an upward trajectory of re-offending. The lowest rate was 32.1% in 2012. The average rate of women re-offending between 2008 and 2017 was 35.7%.

**Figure 15: Percentage of sentenced prisoners (women and men) re-offending within 12 months of discharge in NSW (2008 to 2017)**



Source: BOCSAR NSW Reoffending Database 2000 to 2018

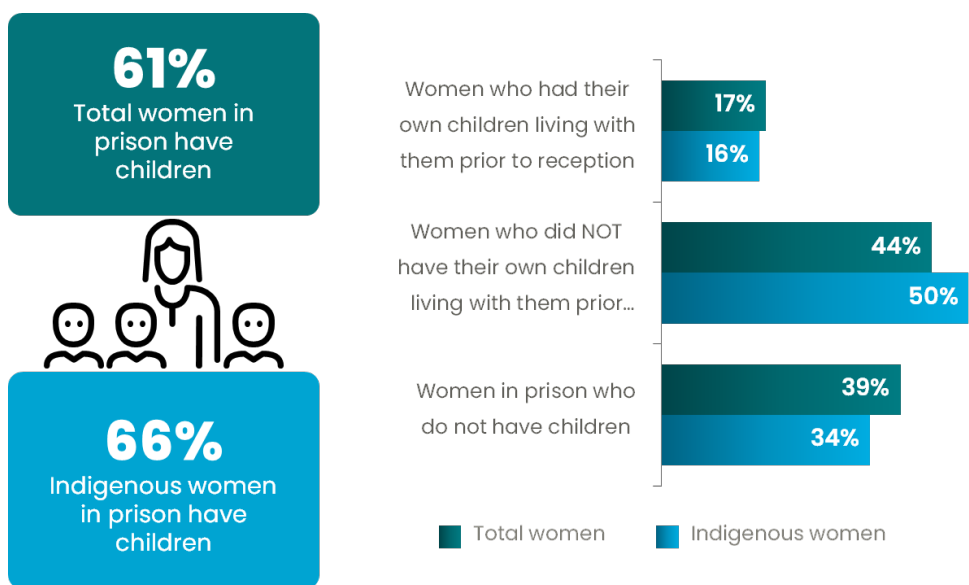
## Parenting status

There is limited publicly available data concerning the household or family structure and parenting status of women in prison in NSW. Statistics on the parenting status were directly sourced from Corrective Services NSW. The NSW Health 2015 Network Patient Health Survey (NPHS) Report also provides some survey data on the parenting status of women in prison and their children's current living situation.

Data from Corrective Services indicates that 61% of women in prison have children. This figure is significantly higher among Indigenous women in prison, two-thirds (66%) of whom have children.

Among women in prison with children, many did not have their children living with them prior to imprisonment (40%). This is higher for Indigenous women, 50% of whom did not have their children living with them prior to imprisonment.

**Figure 16: Parenting status of women in prison in NSW (receptions over 12 months 2017)**



Source: Corrective Services NSW, Corrections Research Evaluation & Statistics (2017)

Base size: Total women n=2645, Indigenous women n=1078

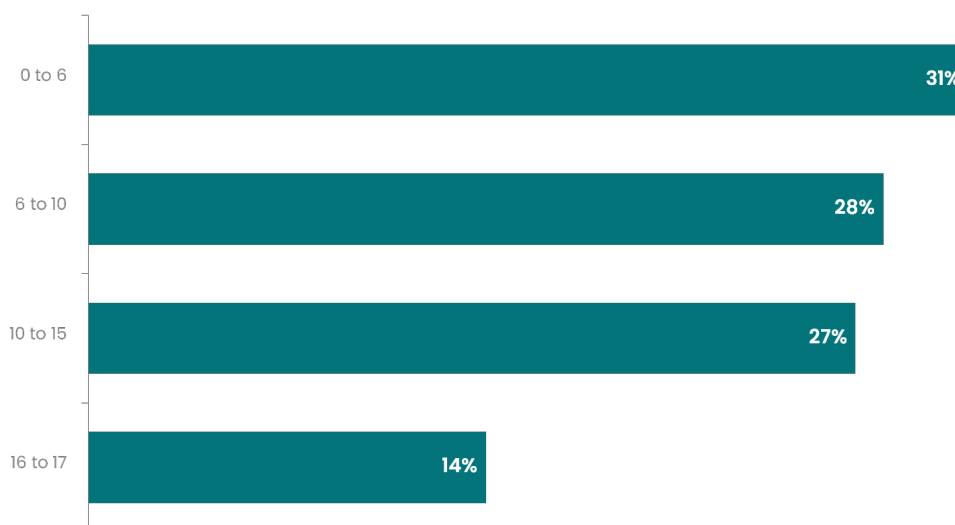
Notes: The data is reception data over 12 months, self-reported at the point of reception to custody.

## Age of children

Women in prison who had children living with them prior to reception were asked to indicate if they had at least one child in different age brackets below the age of 18. As women may have more than one child in a particular age bracket, this data does not indicate the total number of children living with each woman nor the total number of children affected.

This data indicates that the age profile of the children of women in prison is relatively evenly distributed. In 2017 the largest group (31%), had at least one child aged under 6 years old, followed closely by 28% who had at least one child aged 6 to 10 years. Twenty-seven percent had at least one child aged 10 to 15 years and 14% had at least one child aged between 16 and 17 years.

**Figure 17: Age distribution of women’s own children they were living with prior to reception**



Source: Corrective Services NSW, Corrections Research Evaluation & Statistics (2017)

Base size: Total women n=2645 (n=663 responses to this multiple response question whereby women lived with at least one child in each age group).

Notes: The data is reception data – over 12 months. The data is self-reported at the point of reception to custody.

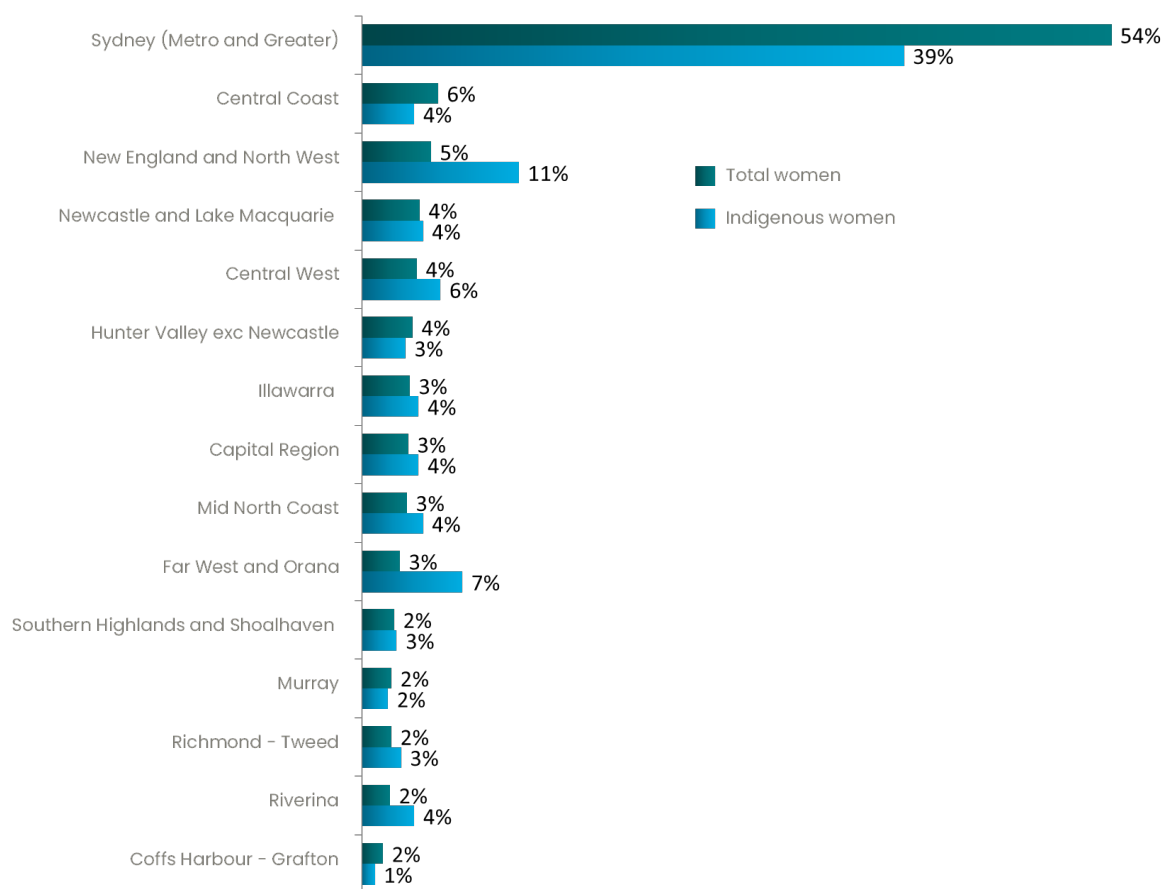
## Last living location prior to imprisonment

Where women in prison last lived is important for understanding where post-release services are needed. However, this can be challenging because women in prison have often been transient. Also, many women move on release to where services and support might be found and there is a well-documented drift towards the city. This geographic data is thus a useful starting point but further work is required to properly understand the post-release geographic break down of women leaving custody and therefore where services may be needed.

Fifty-four percent (531) of women in prison are from the Sydney metro and greater area. For Indigenous women, this proportion is lower at 39%, representing 124 women.

Outside Sydney, the most common areas where women in prison last lived include the Central Coast (6% total and 4% Indigenous), New England and North West (5% total and 11% Indigenous), Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (4% total and 4% Indigenous) and the Central West (4% total and 6% Indigenous).

**Figure 18: Statistical area of last known address of women in prison in NSW**



Source: Corrective Services NSW, NSW Inmate Census 2017  
 Base size: Total women n=1007, Indigenous women n=319

## Other social and health statistics

This section details key statistics relating to other social and health indicators for women in prison in NSW taken from the NSW Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network and the 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (NPHS) published in 2017. It should be noted that a breakdown of these statistics specifically for Indigenous women was not provided in this report and therefore all data discussed below is for total women.

## Housing stability and homelessness

There is currently no data that tracks where women who were in prison in NSW reside after they are released.

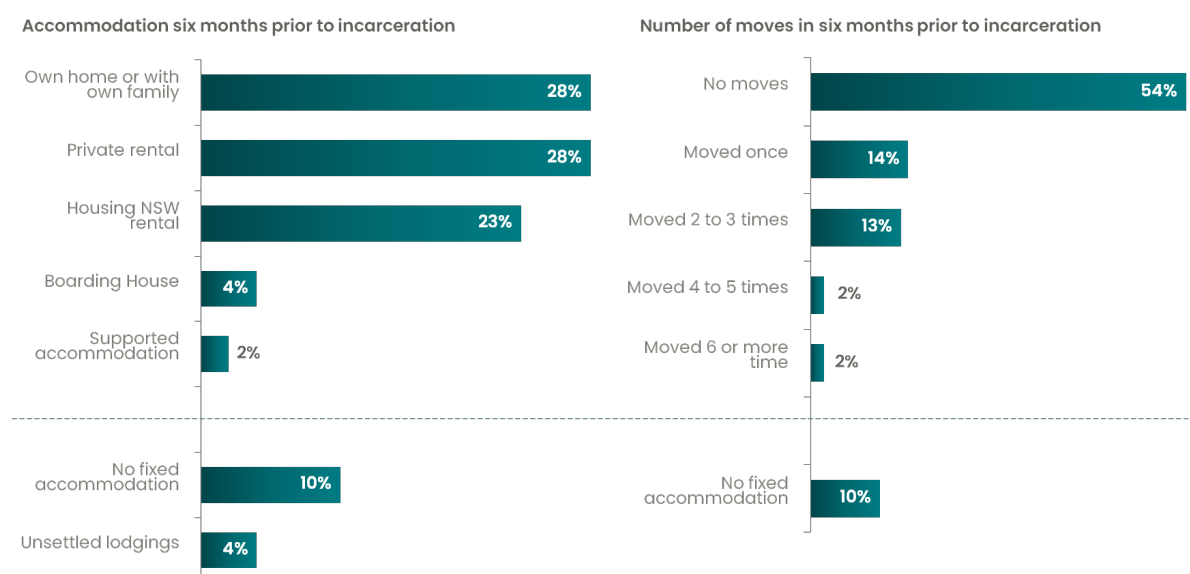
The best available data on prior homelessness among women in prison in NSW comes from the 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (NPHS).

The NPHS found that 14% of women in prison were homeless (in line with the ABS definition of homelessness<sup>51</sup>) in the 6 months prior to incarceration. Ten percent indicated they had 'no fixed accommodation' and a further 4% were in 'unsettled lodging'. It should be noted that this is significantly higher than among male prisoners of whom 6% reported 'no fixed accommodation' and 3% reported 'unsettled lodging'. These figures are also significantly higher than the rate of homelessness among women generally in NSW. According to the ABS 2016 Census there were 15,014 homeless women in NSW, just 0.4% of the total female population.

Frequent moves from one accommodation to another can indicate secondary homelessness and, certainly, unstable housing. The NPHS found that only 54% of women in prison had not moved in the 6 months prior to incarceration. Fourteen percent had moved once and almost a quarter (22%) had moved at least twice in the previous 6 months. Combined with the 10% with no fixed accommodation, this means that one-third (32%) of all women in prison were either homeless or experiencing severe housing instability in the 6 months prior to being in prison.

To put this in some context, this figure is lower for men at 24% (6% in no fixed accommodation plus 18% who moved at least twice in the last 6 months).

**Figure 19: Accommodation status of women in prison 6 months prior to incarceration**



Source: NSW Health, 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (published 2017)

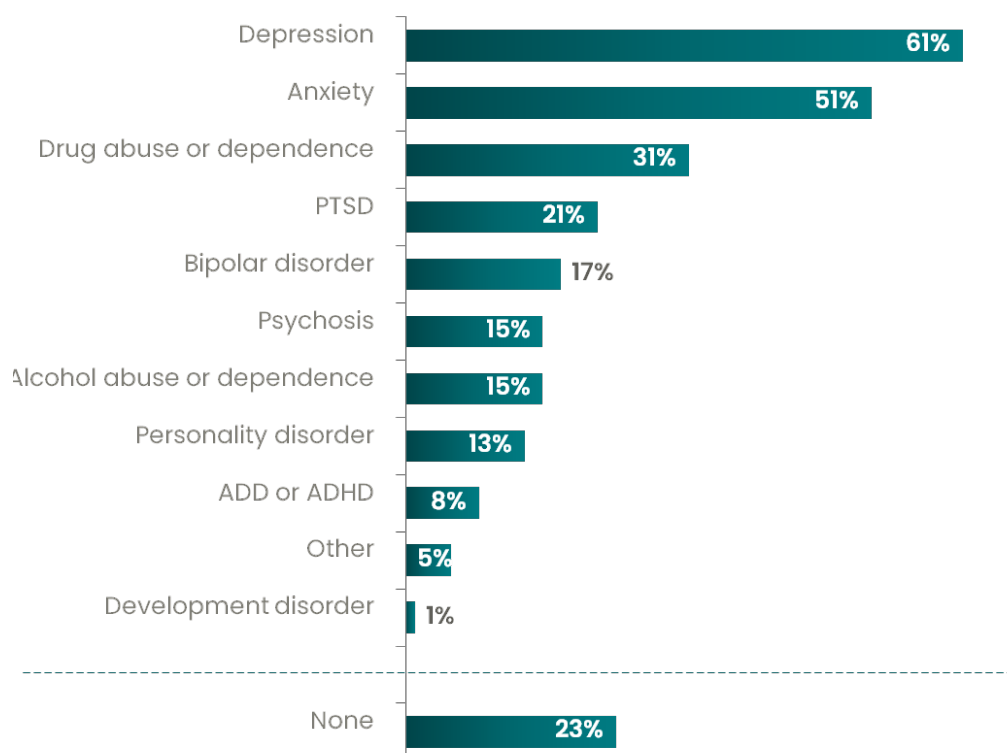
Base: Women n=378



## Mental health

The NPHS indicated that the majority of women in prison (77%) have a diagnosed mental health condition and many have more than one co-existing condition. The most common condition is depression (61%) followed by anxiety (51%). Drug abuse and dependence and alcohol abuse and dependence were reported by 31% and 15% of women respectively.

**Figure 20: Women in prison in NSW who have ever received a diagnosis for mental health condition**



Source: NSW Health, 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (published 2017)

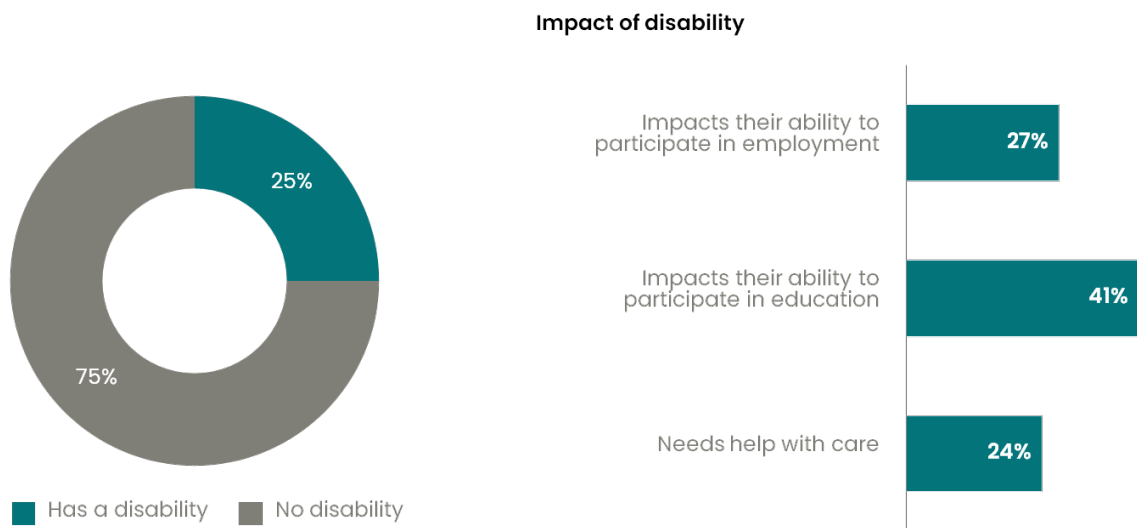
Base: Women n=378

## Disability

The NPHS provides information on the proportion of women in prison with a disability. Overall, just under one-quarter (24%) of all women in prison reported having a disability, a higher proportion than among men (17%).

Of those women with a disability, 27% reported that their disability negatively impacted their ability to do paid work and 41% reported a negative impact on their ability to participate in education. In response to questions about their need for help across 8 domains, 24% of women indicated that they needed help in self-care, mobility or communication domains or in any two of the other domains. This was higher than the figure for males, 17%.

**Figure 21: Proportion of women in prison with a disability and the impact of their disability**



Source: JHFMHN, 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (published 2017)

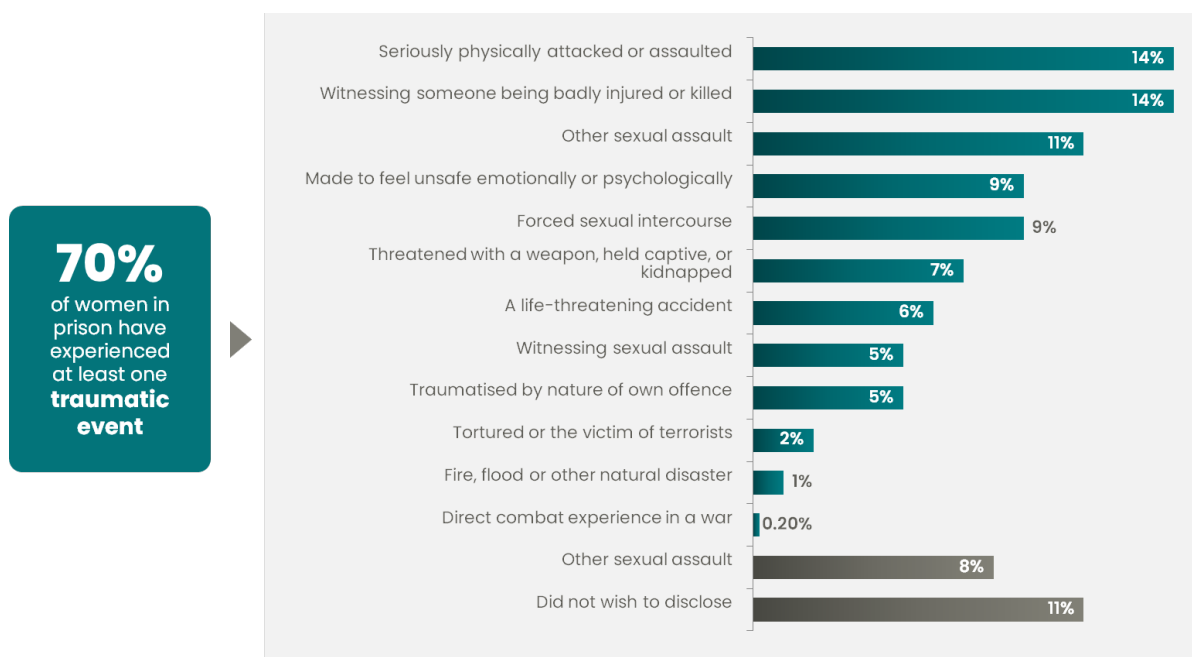
Base: Women n=378

## Experience of trauma

A high proportion of women in prison have experienced at least one traumatic event in their life (70%), slightly higher than that reported by men in prison (65%).

Of those women who reported having experienced a traumatic event, most commonly this was the experience of being 'seriously physically attacked or assaulted' (14%), 'witnessing someone being badly injured or killed' (14%), followed by 'other sexual assault' (11%).

**Figure 22: Experience of trauma and type of trauma experienced among women in prison in NSW**



Source: JHFMHN, 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (published 2017)

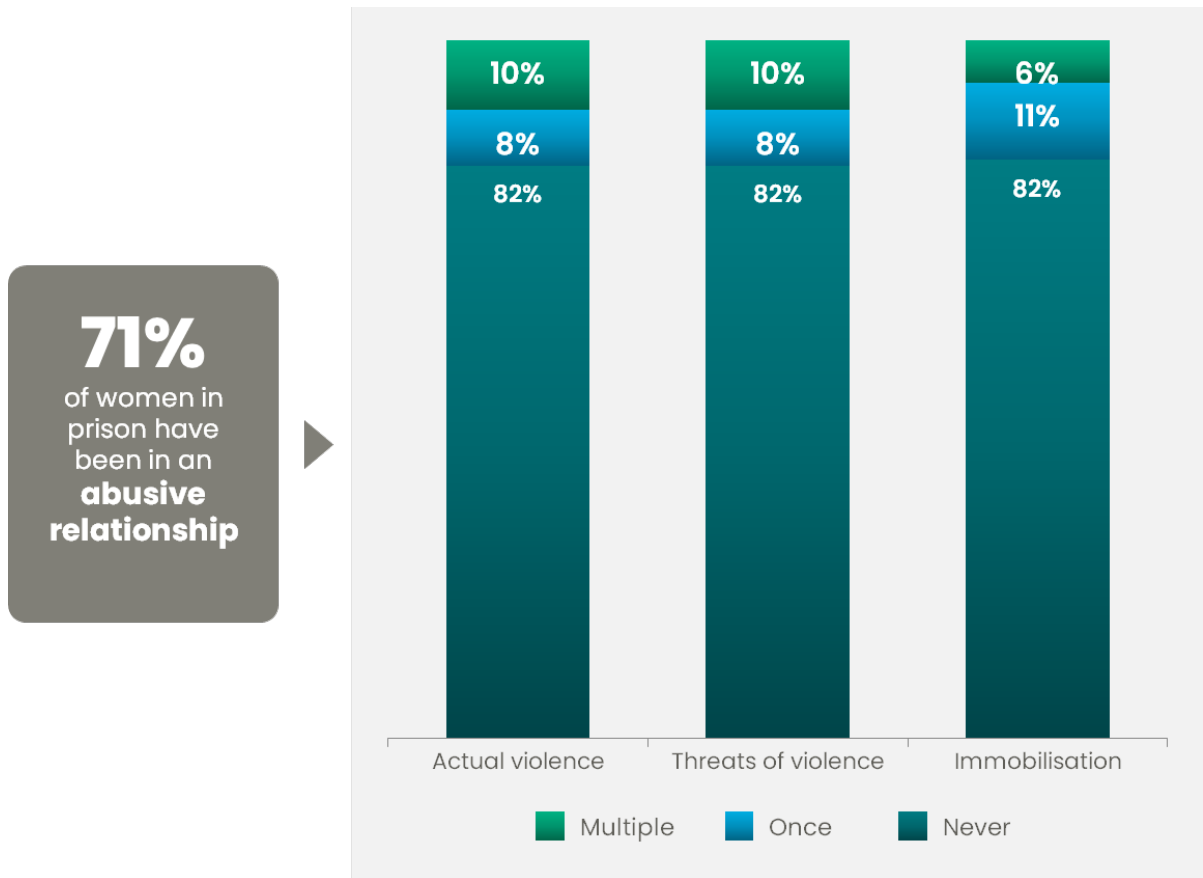
Base: Women n=378

## Experience of gendered violence

The NPHS found that 71% of women in prison reported having ever been in an abusive relationship. This is significantly greater than that reported by men in prison (28%). The survey found that many women (40%) had been involved in more than one violent relationship, again higher than men (12%).

Women were also asked about their experience of sexual violence, that is, actual violence, threats of violence or immobilisation. Just under one-fifth of women in prison (18%) have experienced sexual violence, with 8% stating it happened to them once and 10% stating it happened multiple times. This is broadly similar to the 17% of women in the population as a whole who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 23: Proportion of women in prison in NSW who have ever been in an abusive relationship and experiences of sexual violence.**



Source: JHFMHN, 2015 Network Patient Health Survey Report (published 2017)

Base: Women n=378

## Key statistics on Indigenous women

Throughout this report statistics for Indigenous women have been provided where possible. This is a snapshot of key statistics on Indigenous women in NSW prisons.

- As at June 2019 there were 298 Indigenous women in prison in NSW. This represents 32% of the total female prison population, a remarkably high proportion, given that Indigenous people make up only 2.9% of the NSW population.<sup>53</sup>
- 61% of Indigenous women in prison are serving a sentence and 39% are on remand. For non-Indigenous women, 58% are on a sentence and 42% on remand.
- There has been a 43% increase in the number of Indigenous women in prison in NSW between March 2013 and June 2019. This is significantly higher than the increase in non-Indigenous women (31%) during this period.
- The top most serious offences for Indigenous women are justice procedure offences (27%), followed by acts intended to cause injury (24%) and theft (11%).
- On average, Indigenous women had shorter sentences (89 days) than that of total women (131 days). Indigenous women are likely to be held longer on remand (58 days) compared to total women (47 days).
- A very high proportion of Indigenous women in prison have been in prison before (87%), significantly higher than the proportion of total women (72%).
- The average age of Indigenous women is 33, which is consistent across on remand and sentenced populations and just slightly younger than the average age of total women at 35.
- Two-thirds (66%) of Indigenous women in prison have children which is higher than total women (61%).
- Indigenous women are more likely to come from areas outside the Sydney metro area (61%) than total women (46%).

Indigenous women make up **32%** of the total female prison population although Indigenous people are only **2.9%** of the NSW population.

Indigenous women are likely to be held longer on remand (**58 days**) compared to total women (**47 days**)

A very high proportion of Indigenous women in prison have been in prison before (**87%**), which is significantly higher than total women (**72%**)

# Support services for women exiting prison in NSW

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This section provides details and an analysis of the breadth and scope of services for women exiting prison in NSW, diversionary programs and legal/ court support services.

It only includes services that specifically target or cater to people leaving prison (or being diverted from prison) as mainstream services are rarely equipped to fully support the complexities of those exiting prison. Moreover, people with justice system involvement are often actively excluded from mainstream services because of their criminal record.

A more detailed list of the services included in this census can be found in the complementary document *Profile of women in prison in NSW, Part B: Census of services for women affected by the corrections system*.

## Overview

There are a limited number of services specifically for women exiting prison in NSW. In addition, the types of support they provide and the geographical areas they service, are often very limited.

Across NSW there are 8 support services/ programs that are specifically for women exiting prison or at risk of re-incarceration. There is a handful of additional programs that cater for both men and women leaving custody. Services vary in how long support is provided for, how intensive they are and whether they include a housing focus.

The types of support provided by services included in this census are primarily 'transitional' and 'reintegration' services. Some also provide diversionary and legal support.

### Transitional services

Transitional and reintegration services are those that are specifically aimed at supporting people during and after their move from prison into the community. They may offer the following and typically involve some kind of case-management support.

- Transitional accommodation
  - Short to medium term housing, usually with some case management support
- General transitional support, including:
  - Short term case-management support (referral and service connection)
  - Long term intensive relational case management support
  - Housing support (helping to connect with housing providers)

- Skill building, such as:
  - Mentoring
  - Employment/ enterprise skills
  - Pro-social group activities
  - Parenting
- Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) counselling.

### **Diversiory services**

Diversiory services are those that aim to prevent ‘at risk’ women from ending up in the criminal justice system. Diversiory services often overlap with transitional services and also aim to stop women from re-imprisonment. Typically, they provide various supports and life skills such as:

- Mentoring
- Employment/ enterprise skills
- Pro-social group activities
- Parenting.

### **Legal and court support**

Legal and court support services usually provide free legal advice for women who have come into contact with the criminal justice system, including:

- Legal advice and casework services
- Information on legal proceedings and support in court.

### **Efficacy of services**

A full understanding of the efficacy of the services reviewed in this census would require access to evaluation data for each of the services. This is not currently available. However, as noted in the discussion and framing of this report, there are certain principles and factors which underpin an effective service for women exiting prison. These factors (discussed in section 2) include:

- Longer term support which helps to foster a trusting relationship with the case-manager
- Longer term support that is adaptive and flexible as client needs change throughout their transition into community
- Safe and suitable accommodation as a priority
- Holistic support for a range of complex and interacting issues, including mental health conditions, cognitive impairment and drug and alcohol use
- Building of skills often by way of role-modelling, mentoring, linking with community and social activities
- Advocacy to assist people access and navigate a complex service system
- Trauma-informed approaches.
- Therapeutic intervention

## Evaluation results

Three of the services included in this census have undergone a recent formal evaluation. The findings of these evaluations are in line with anecdotal reports from service providers about 'what works' in supporting women exiting prison. A brief summary of the evaluation findings follows.

### **Community Restorative Centre (CRC) Transitional Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Service Evaluation**

The evaluation of the CRC Transitional AOD service<sup>54</sup> found that the program's key strengths are:

- Harm minimisation, rather than abstinence-based approach
- The flexible outreach service delivery model, including the establishment of relationships with clients prior to their release from custody
- The focus on broader client wellbeing rather than specifically on substance misuse
- The compassionate approach to clients that overcomes social isolation
- The counselling approach of the AOD workers which creates a sense of safety and empowers clients to discuss deep-seated issues of trauma that they have not previously discussed with counsellors.

### **Barnardo's Beyond Barbed Wire Evaluation**

The evaluation of the Barnardo's Beyond Barbed Wire<sup>55</sup> found that the program's key strengths are:

- Having a supportive mentor
- Non-judgemental support and having a mentor to talk to
- Tailored case-management
- Referral to other services and advocacy
- Assistance with short-term/ transitional housing
- Work experience placements
- Parenting programs and information.

### **Women's Justice Network (WJN) Adult Mentoring Program Evaluation**

Data collection on recidivism rates of participants in WJN's Adult Mentoring Program (2014-2015) found that 93% of women who were matched to a mentor did not return to custody. Of the 7% who had returned to custody, all had maintained contact with their mentor via letter writing and planned to resume the relationship once released. This demonstrates the long-lasting rapport and trust built between mentor and mentee.



## Funding

The services included in this census receive funding from a variety of sources, primarily Corrective Services NSW through the Funded Partnerships Initiative (FPI), Family and Community Services (FACS) through the Specialist Homelessness Services fund (SHS) and NSW and the Commonwealth health department for AOD-related services. A few services also receive funding from philanthropy, donations and small grants.

Not all services were able to provide detailed information on funding. However, with the information provided, KWOOP calculated that the total funding amount for these services accessed by women in the last financial year was \$3,994,448 or just under \$4M. This includes funding for services to women through both gender specific services and non-gender specific services.

## Number of women supported

Approximately 615 women accessed the services included in this census. However, it is likely that some women access multiple services and therefore the number of individual women receiving support is likely to be lower.

**Table 10: Specific services for women leaving prison or at risk of criminal justice system involvement**

Project	Client # p/a	Funding p/a	Funding Stream	Beds
Miranda Project (CRC)	58	\$348,178	FACS/Women NSW/Philanthropic	0
Inner City Women's Transition (CRC)	82 (40 long term)	\$247,904	FACS/SHS	3 (GSHS negotiated)
Guthrie House	34	\$1,071,536	FACS/CS NSW/NSW Health	5
Rosa Coordinated Care	50	\$520,000	FACS/SHS	0 (But negotiate beds as part of casework)
Beyond Barbed Wire (Barnardo's)	25	\$120,000	FACS/SHS	0

Project	Client # p/a	Funding p/a	Funding Stream	Beds
Success Works (Dress for Success)	20 (growing)	\$206,345	Philanthropic	0
Central Coast Women's Moving Forward	10	\$20,000	Central Coast Social Enterprise Grants	0
Women's Justice Network	70-100	\$470,000	FACS/Philanthropic	0
<b>TOTAL: 8 services funded</b>	<b>379 Clients</b>	<b>\$3,003,963 funding</b>		<b>8 beds</b>

**Table 11: Non-gender specific services for people leaving custody**

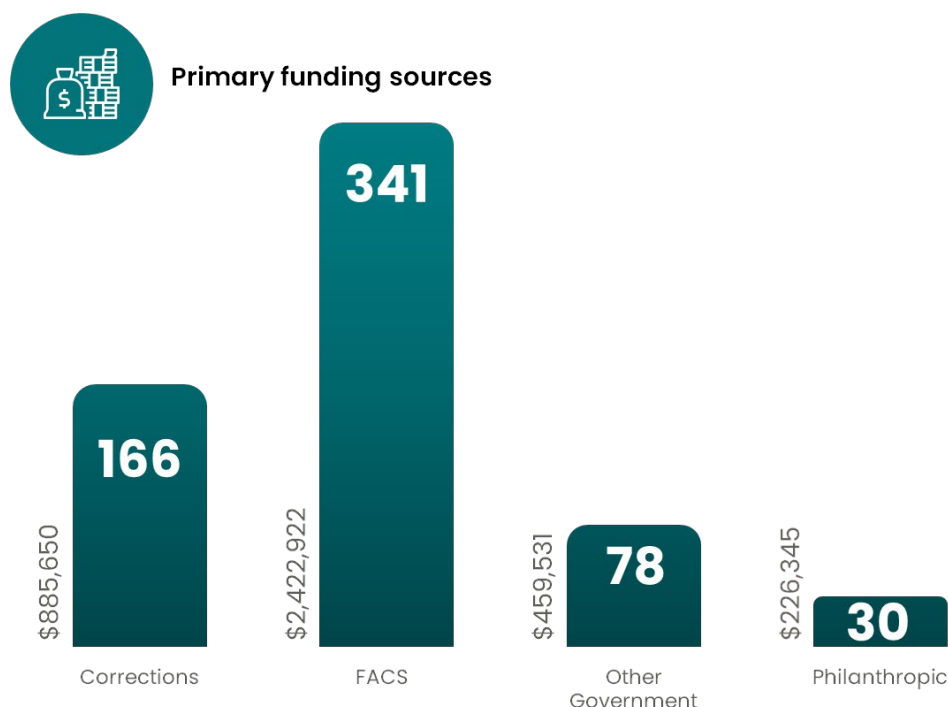
Project	Client # p/a	Funding p/a	Funding Stream	Beds
ITS (Various service providers in 26 locations)	960 (total) 144 women (15%)	\$3,003,000 (total) \$450,450 (women)	Corrective Services NSW	0
ERS (CRC)	20 total- 2 women (10%)	\$352,000 (total) \$35,200 (women)	Corrective Services NSW	Negotiated with FACS
Penrith Nepean (CRC) GHSH	40 total 7 women (17.5%)	\$183,182 (total) \$32,056 (women)	FACS/SHS	3 (1 for women, 2 for men) Negotiated transitional GHSH beds
Newtown BHOP (CRC)	40 total 5 women (12.5%)	\$105,988 (total) \$13,248 (women)	FACS/SHS	0
Transitional Indigenous Service Broken Hill (CRC)	107 total 27 women (25%)	\$660,345 (total)	Federal Indigenous Advancement Strategy	0

Project	Client # p/a	Funding p/a	Funding Stream	Beds
		\$165,086 (women)		
AOD Transition support (CRC)	115 total 30 women (26%)	\$1,015,948 \$264,146 (women)	NSW Health, Federal Health, Wentwest PHN, CESPNN	0
Samaritans Recovery Point	233 total 21 women (9%)	\$336,661 (total) \$30,299 (women)	NSW Health	0
8 service types	1615 Total	\$5,657,124 (total)		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>236 Women</b>	<b>\$990,485 (for women)</b>		

**Table 12: Total funding for women through specialist and non-specialist services**

Type of service	Number of women supported p/a	Funding	Per woman break down pa	Beds
Specialist women's	379	\$3,003,963	\$7,926	8
Non-specialist	236	\$990,485	\$4,196	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>\$3,994,448</b>	<b>\$6,495</b>	<b>9</b>

Figure 24: Primary funding sources



## Analysis of services by funding type

### Funded by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)

CSNSW supports people exiting prison through the Funded Partnership Initiative (FPI) and through a number of programs/ services for women currently in prison that operate within correctional facilities.

### Funded Partnership Initiative (FPI)

The FPI funds organisations to provide various transitional services for people who have exited prison. Information provided by CSNSW indicates the funding amount for the FPI model over the 5-year period to 30 June 2019 was \$37.1M. For the current financial year ending 30 June 2020, it is \$6.8M.

There are three key streams of funding under the FPI:

- Transitional Supported Accommodation (TSA)
  - TSA services provide up to 12 weeks of post-release accommodation and casework support linked to the CSNSW case plan, to higher risk parolees.
  - 7 locations across NSW with total of 30 beds servicing 120 clients pa. However, only one TSA is a service for women.
  - The total 5-year funding for TSA was \$9.9M to 30 June 2019. For the current financial year, it is \$2.4M.

- Initial Transitional Support (ITS)
  - ITS services deliver a range of activities linked to the CSNSW case plan to higher risk parolees for up to 12 weeks post release.
  - 26 locations supporting 960 clients pa in total.
  - The total 5-year funding for ITS was \$9.7m to 30 June 2019. For the current financial year, it is \$3.03M.
- Extended Reintegration Service (ERS)
  - ERS provides multi-agency case coordination and management, including social housing, for 12 months to higher risk parolees with significant complex issues.
  - A total of 20 clients pa in 3 areas, Bankstown, Fairfield and Liverpool.
  - The total 5-year funding for ERS was \$1.7m to 30 June 2019. For the current financial year, it is \$352,000.

In the 2019 financial year, CSNSW-funded FPI projects supported 166 women exiting prison through three different funding streams. This amounted to approximately \$885,650. This excludes funding for in-custody support services.

**Table 13. Corrective Services NSW funding\*<sup>56</sup>**

CORRECTIVE SERVICES FUNDING	CLIENT #	AMOUNT	BEDS
ITS (Various service providers in 26 locations)	960 (total) <b>144 women (15%)</b>	3,003,000 (total) <b>\$450,450 (women)</b>	0
ERS (CRC)	20 (total) <b>2 women (10%)</b>	352,000 (total) <b>\$35,200 (women)</b>	Negotiated with FACS
TSA (Guthrie House, Enmore)	20	\$400,000 (women, estimated)	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>\$885,650</b>	<b>5</b>

## Funded by FACS (now part of the Department of Communities and Justice)

Family and Community Services (FACS) Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) provides funding to not-for-profit organisations providing support for people experiencing homelessness. There was a major reform of SHS in 2014 called Going Home Staying Home (GHS) which identified people leaving institutional settings such as prison as a priority group.

In the last financial year, FACS funded 8 services that supported an estimated 341 women exiting prison. The estimated proportion spent on services for women totalled \$2.4M.

**Table 14. FACS funding**

PRIMARY FACS FUNDING	CLIENT #	AMOUNT	FUNDER	BEDS
Miranda Project (CRC)	58	\$348,178	FACS/Women NSW/Philanthropic	0
Inner City Women's Transition (CRC)	82 (40 long term)	\$247,904	FACS/SHS	3 (GHS negotiated)
Guthrie House	20 women (counted in CSNSW table) +14 (counted here)	\$71,536 (all non-CSNSW funding)	FACS/CS NSW/NSW Health	5
Rosa Coordinated Care	50	\$520,000	FACS/SHS	0 (But negotiate beds as part of casework)
Beyond Barbed Wire (Barnardos)	25	\$120,000	FACS/SHS	0
Penrith Nepean (CRC) GHS	40 total <b>7 women (17.5%)</b>	\$83,182 (total) <b>\$32,056 (women)</b>	FACS/SHS	3 (1 for women, 2 for men) Negotiated transitional GHS beds

PRIMARY FACS FUNDING	CLIENT #	AMOUNT	FUNDER	BEDS
Newtown BHOP (CRC) GSHH	40 total <b>5 women (12.5%)</b>	\$105,988 (total) <b>\$13,248 (women)</b>	FACS/SHS	0
Women's Justice Network	70-100	\$470,000	FACS/Philanthropic	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>\$2,422,922</b>		

## Funded by other Government departments

NSW Health, two local area health networks and the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet also provide funding for 3 services for women exiting prison. KWOOP estimates that in the last financial year these other government departments funded support for approximately 78 women exiting prison, spending \$459,531.

**Table 15: Other government funding**

OTHER GOV FUNDING	CLIENT #	AMOUNT	FUNDER	BEDS
Indigenous transition Broken Hill (CRC)	107 total <b>27 women (25%)</b>	\$660,345 (total) <b>\$165,086 (women)</b>	Indigenous Advancement Strategy, Federal Govt	0
AOD Transition support (CRC)	115 total <b>30 women (26%)</b>	\$1,015,948 (total) <b>\$264,146 (women)</b>	NSW Health, Federal Health, Wentwest PHN, CESPNN	0
Samaritans Recovery Point	233 total <b>21 women (9%)</b>	\$336,661 (total) <b>\$30,299 (women)</b>	NSW Health	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>\$459,531</b>		<b>0</b>

## Funded by miscellaneous grants, donations and philanthropy

Four services report receiving miscellaneous grants, donations and philanthropic funds.

We estimate that in the last financial year 2 services were fully funded by miscellaneous grants, donations and philanthropy totalling \$226,345. Approximately 30 women accessed these services.

**Table 16: Miscellaneous grants and philanthropy**

Philanthropic only	Client #	Amount	Funder	Beds
Success Works (Dress for Success)	20 (growing)	\$206,345	Philanthropic	0
Central Coast Women's Moving Forward	10	\$20,000	Central Coast Social Enterprise Grants	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>\$226,345</b>		



# NSW Government policy

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## Background

On 1 July 2019 the Departments of Family and Community Services (FACS) and Justice (which oversees Corrective Services NSW) merged into a new principal department located within the Stronger Communities cluster titled Communities and Justice.

The information in this chapter is based upon the funding models prior to the merger. This is important to note because two of the key sources of NSW Government funding for services for women exiting prison have to date been FACS and Justice. How this merger will impact strategy and funding is yet to be revealed.

## Current Government funding streams

As detailed in the previous section, there are two key NSW Government funding streams for services for women exiting prison:

- Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) Funded Partnership Initiative (FPI), which provides funding to not-for-profits to deliver non-gender specific support:
  - Transitional Accommodation Support
  - Extended Reintegration Services
  - Initial Transition Support.
- Family and Community Services (FACS) via Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) funding, and Women NSW, provide a range of funding streams for not-for-profit organisations providing support for people experiencing homelessness and for specific population groups (such as women at risk of violence). In 2014, the Going Home Staying Home (GSHS) reform identified people leaving institutional settings such as prison as a priority group. The extent to which this has translated into improved responses to this group with regard to homelessness requires further examination.

NSW Health also provides some funding for AOD-focussed programs for people on release, often through services already providing other forms of specialist support.

At a Federal level, funding is provided through Primary Health Networks (PHNs), the Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program (NGOTGP) and the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

## Government strategy

There has been increasing public discussion about the exponential growth in the number of women in prison in NSW, especially Indigenous women. One of the aims of KWOOP's research was to understand the current NSW Government's strategy on this issue.

A stakeholder interview was undertaken with the Principal Advisor, Women Offenders, in Corrective Services NSW, to gain information on current NSW Government strategy. This confirmed the lack of a comprehensive strategy to address the growing number of women in prison. However, on a more positive note the June 2019 announcement of 14 new NSW Premier's Priorities<sup>57</sup> includes three priorities under the title 'Breaking the Cycle'.

- Reducing domestic violence reoffending
  - Reduce the number of domestic violence reoffenders by 25 per cent by 2023.
- Reducing recidivism in the prison population
  - Reduce adult reoffending following release from prison by 5 per cent by 2023.
- Reducing homelessness
  - Reduce street homelessness across NSW by 50 per cent by 2025.

Feedback from CSNSW indicates that while it is not yet known how these priorities will be converted to policy and programs, it is envisaged that women will be an important target of activities under these Premier's priorities.

## Conclusions and discussion

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This baseline study paints a disturbing picture of women in prison in New South Wales. It confirms the high proportion of women who experience multiple factors of disadvantage (mental health, disability, homelessness, histories of abuse, trauma and violence) that individually, and in combination, contribute to particular vulnerability to involvement with the criminal justice system. The overrepresentation of Indigenous women further reflects the unacceptably high levels of disadvantage and discrimination experienced by Indigenous people within criminal justice systems across Australian jurisdictions.

Of particular concern is the increasing rate of imprisonment of women and the high numbers of these women who are either on remand or in prison for short sentences and for non-violent crimes. Given what is known about the detrimental impacts of incarceration on women and the proven long-term and intergenerational impacts on children whose parents have been imprisoned, this has enormous costs for these families and for society in general.

The alarmingly high rate of imprisonment of Indigenous women warrants closer and urgent consideration in order to better understand and address the major contributing factors. Greater scrutiny and review of the role of police, sentencing practices, bail conditions and community services that enable women to be diverted from the prison system, is clearly called for.

In addition, data indicating that over 40% of women re-offend in the 12 months following their release, highlights the acute lack of services and support for women post incarceration that could increase their chances of successfully integrating back into the community. Attention to making sure women have access to safe and secure housing on release is a critical priority.

There is good evidence on the effectiveness of well-structured services that support women to integrate back into the community following incarceration. However, the census of available services mapped here confirms that the current approach is piecemeal and fragmented and cannot adequately meet the breadth of needs of women exiting the correctional system. There is solid evidence of the effectiveness of some of these services in reducing recidivism, particularly those that are run on a sustained basis and delivered in a holistic manner. The paucity of resources currently available for these specialised services contrasts strikingly with the very high costs of keeping women in prison.

In discussions for this report, service providers have noted that women are frequently excluded from mainstream services because they have a criminal record. For instance, many mainstream domestic violence services will not work

Of particular concern is the increasing rate of imprisonment of women and the high numbers of these women who are either on remand or in prison for short sentences and for non-violent crimes

with women on release from prison, especially if they have any history of violence. Similarly, many drug and alcohol services exclude women with criminal records and/or who have been imprisoned. Services often have internal policies that preclude acceptance of more than one person on release from custody at any one time and use different risk assessment forms for people coming out of prison. There is significant misunderstanding and fear in some parts of the community sector that results in further social exclusion of vulnerable populations leaving prison.

Coordinated action to reduce this discrimination and remove these restrictions by mainstream services should be a priority.

The very nature of imprisonment means that women do not typically have the capacity to connect with services that could be life-changing (if not life-saving) at the time that they most require them. The punitive nature of imprisonment and the absence of connection with the outside world, including in the lead up to release, can mean that even when women want and are ready to make changes in their lives, they do not have the means or the support required to do this.

Given the complexity of factors that contribute to women becoming involved in the correctional system and the fact that many of these factors are potentially ameliorable through appropriate community-based services, a multi-stakeholder and whole of government response is called for, going beyond the criminal justice system. Effective support to address mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, trauma and abuse, domestic violence, poverty and homelessness requires joined-up responses from across the government and non-government service spectrum.

## Key areas for action

KWOOP proposes the following as a matter of urgency.

### **A whole of government multi-stakeholder taskforce**

A targeted strategic taskforce should be established to consider and drive development and implementation a long-term multifaceted strategy. It should have high level NSW Government leadership, appropriate representation from relevant community-based organisations and women with lived experience of incarceration, and should incorporate the following key elements:

- Significant investment in community-based services, supports and housing for vulnerable women at risk of criminal justice system involvement. Such services should include support with mental health, disability, drug and alcohol use, domestic violence and legal matters, as well as addressing homelessness and unstable accommodation.
- Increased access to effective diversionary programs for women at risk of criminal justice system involvement, especially for women who are parents.

- Coordinated, state-wide, funded, community-based responses for incarcerated women leaving custody in order to reduce rates of recidivism and support successful reintegration into the community.
- Specific initiatives for Indigenous women to reduce rates of imprisonment.
- Programs that enable women who are parents to retain meaningful contact while their children while incarcerated.
- A coordinated approach to the removal of the restrictions and discrimination that prevent women with criminal records or histories of incarceration from accessing relevant mainstream services including drug and alcohol services, domestic violence support, housing and employment.

### **Further research in key areas**

- Research into the perspectives and experience of women who have been incarcerated to provide further insights into the factors leading to imprisonment and the types of supports and interventions that could reduce re-offending.
- Investigation of the specific factors contributing to the high levels of incarceration of Indigenous women and the most appropriate strategies to address this.
- Investigation of the factors contributing to the high levels of women on remand including those released from remand unsentenced or with backdated sentences and exploration of strategies to reduce this.
- Financial modelling of the relative costs of imprisonment versus community-based diversion programs. Detailed investigation into potential savings to be made by re-directing government funds from prisons into expanded community-based services aiming to reduce women's involvement in the correctional system.

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- <sup>36</sup> Please note that these principles have been previously published with some variation in a number of reports and publications by one of the authors Mindy Sotiri, including most recently, Sotiri & Russell (2018) *Pathways Home: How can we deliver better outcomes for people who have been in prison*, in *Housing Works*, 41.
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- <sup>50</sup> CSNSW Correspondence, 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020, citing CRES data extracted on request
- <sup>51</sup> ABS definition of Homelessness: When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.  
[<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view=>]
- <sup>52</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>53</sup> Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016
- <sup>54</sup> CRC AOD Transition Program Evaluation January 7, 2016.
- <sup>55</sup> Economic Evaluation of Beyond Barbed Wire, 2018.
- <sup>56</sup> Not all services were able to provide exact breakdowns of different funding streams, estimates have been made based on total amounts from CSNW and number of clients
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