An outreach based AOD care model for people transitioning out of Prison.

Authors:
Jermaine Sakr[1], David Chivers[1], Marisa Moliterno[1], Stella Settumba[1,2]

[1]Community Restorative Centre, Sydney, Australia, [2]National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia,

Presenters' emails: *jermaine.sakr@crcnsw.org.au, david.chivers@crcnsw.org.au, marisa.moliterno@crcnsw.org.au, stella.stolk@crcnsw.org.au*

Background: People with experience of the criminal legal system in Australia experience disproportionate harms from risky alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and may face barriers to mainstream counselling (AIHW, 2026; Bryant et al., 2020). The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) AOD Transition Program provides outreach-based, harm-reduction AOD support from 3 months pre-release to 9 months post-release.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: AOD workers meet clients where they are and provide flexible, wrap-around support. Eligibility includes: age ≥18; living in Greater Metropolitan Sydney; prior custody with AOD-linked offending; and voluntary participation. Support addresses harmful AOD use and common post-release needs (e.g., housing, health and psychosocial supports) to improve wellbeing and reduce re-incarceration.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Since 2012, the program has supported 1,556 clients. In May 2025–April 2026, 206 clients received support (42 active at period end; 153 closed; 11 pre-engaged). For closed cases, mean duration was 140 days with a mean of 15 sessions per client. Clients were 69% male and 27% female; 38% First Nations; and 25% from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Amphetamines were the most common primary drug of concern (42%). Engagement and acceptability were high (goal achievement/completion; CSQ-8). Client-reported outcomes (SURE) suggested improved mental health and AOD outcomes. During the support period, 7% returned to custody.

Conclusion: Outreach-based service models can improve access, engagement and outcomes for people transitioning from prison, particularly for those who face barriers to office-based services.

Implications on practice: Services should meet people where they are, recognising common post-release challenges (e.g., homelessness and avoidance of office-based supports). Client-reported outcome measures should be interpreted cautiously, particularly when collected pre-release, as scores may be influenced by timing and context.

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