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**Justice**  
Corrective Services

# Research Digest

Corrective Services NSW

## Increase in the community corrections population

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### KEY SUMMARY

- Long term trends data indicate that the number of offenders subject to supervision in the community by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has increased substantially in recent years, following a period of relative stability. This was particularly apparent over the past 2 years (March 2015 – March 2017), during which the community correction population increased from 16,042 to 18,740 (an increase of 17%).
- The aim of this Research Digest is to examine factors associated with the recent increases in the community corrections population, including trends in the types of supervised orders imposed and pathways to supervision from the community or custody. Analyses were conducted over a selected recent measurement period spanning July 2013 to March 2017.
- Growth in the overall community corrections population during the measurement period was associated with increases in the number of custody-based offenders being released to parole supervision, in addition to increases in offenders receiving various community-based sentences including Good Behaviour Bonds, Home Detention, Intensive Correction Orders (ICOs) and supervised Suspended Sentences.
- Factors such as the general increase in the custodial population, processes of diversion from custody to community supervision and the flow of offenders being sentenced directly to community supervision, together with changes in sentencing practices and legislation, are contributing to the observed recent growth in the community corrections population.

## FINDINGS

Long term trends in the overall community corrections population between April 2002 and March 2017 are shown in Figure 1. It can be seen that there has been significant variation in the number of offenders subject to community supervision over the past fifteen years. In particular, the community corrections population totalled some 18,000 offenders between 2004 and 2009 before rapidly decreasing to a low of 15,851 offenders in late 2010. This decline in the population remained relatively stable for five years before again increasing rapidly from 2015. The most recent data available (March 2017) shows that the community correction population has reached a level of growth comparable to the one observed ten years ago.

An examination of trends data over the last two years of measurement indicated that the community corrections population increased by 17% from 16,042 offenders in March 2015 to 18,740 offenders in March 2017.



Figure 1. Number of offenders supervised by CSNSW in the community between 2002 and 2017

The aim of this paper was to explore factors associated with the recent rapid increases in the overall community corrections population. The following analyses were conducted on a selected measurement period that incorporates recent growth, spanning between July 2013 and March 2017. All reported monthly figures are based on first day of the month and include both active orders and orders where supervision had been temporarily suspended.

In general, an increase in the overall community correction population is driven by two factors: a) an increase in the average time under supervision, and / or b) an increase in the number of offenders being sentenced to supervision.

Trends examining the average (median) time under supervision have been performed for different order types. Data showed that the average time offenders spent under supervision

in the community for each order remained stable or slightly decreased over the measurement period. For presentational purpose, Figure 2 shows the average (median) time under supervision across all orders for the community-based population over the measurement period, compared to the overall population size. It can be seen that the median number of days that offenders were subject to supervision has remained relatively stable, or declined slightly. This indicates that recent increases in the community correction population is not attributable to accumulative processes associated with offenders remaining under supervision for longer periods of time.

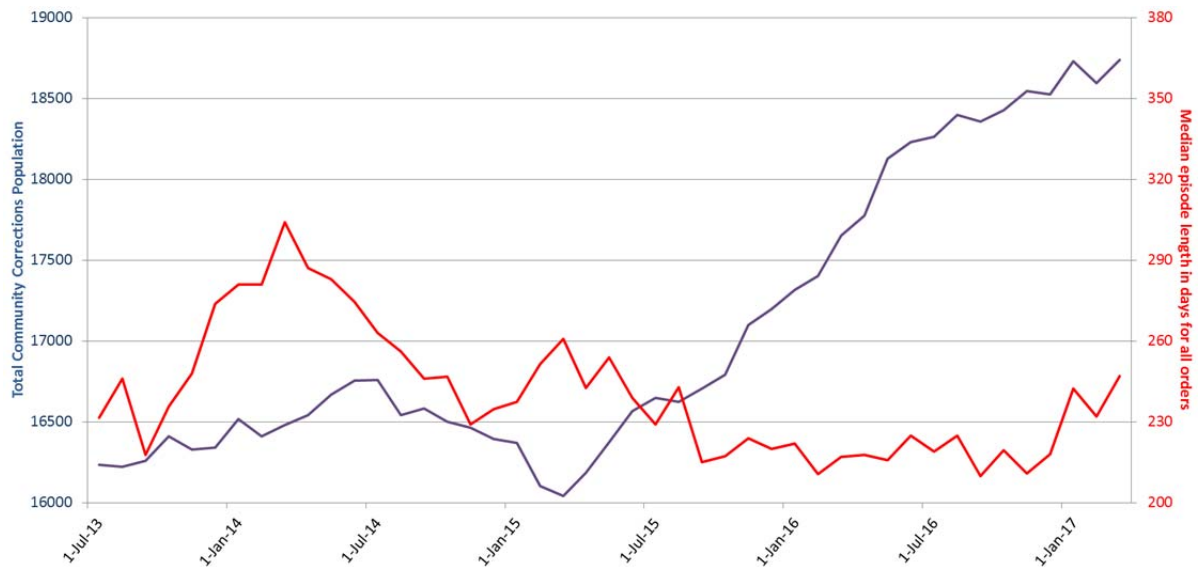


Figure 2. Median episode length across all orders in the community during the measurement period.

The following analyses examined covariance between overall population trends and the prevalence of various orders involving community supervision. In the interest of brevity only orders that show relevant co-variation over time will be reported<sup>1</sup>. Figure 3 shows monthly trends in the number of offenders receiving supervised Good Behaviour Bonds. The number of individuals receiving a Good Behaviour Bond rose from 7,103 in July 2013 to 7,880 in March 2017 (Figure 3), representing a proportional increase of 11%. This growth appeared to mirror the increase in the general community population.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the total community offender population has been defined as a unique count of offenders under management by Community Corrections. Where population for a particular order is quoted, it is a unique count of offenders with a current order of that type. It should be noted that since an offender may fall into more than one order category, the unique count of offenders across all orders is less than the sum of offender counts for each order category.



Figure 3. Total community corrections population versus Offenders receiving Good Behaviour Bonds during the measurement period.

Figure 4 shows monthly trends in the number of offenders subjected to a supervised parole order (including both orders actively supervised and orders where supervision is currently suspended). The number of parolees rose from 4,541 in July 2013 to 5,694 in March 2017 (Figure 3), an increase of 25.4%.

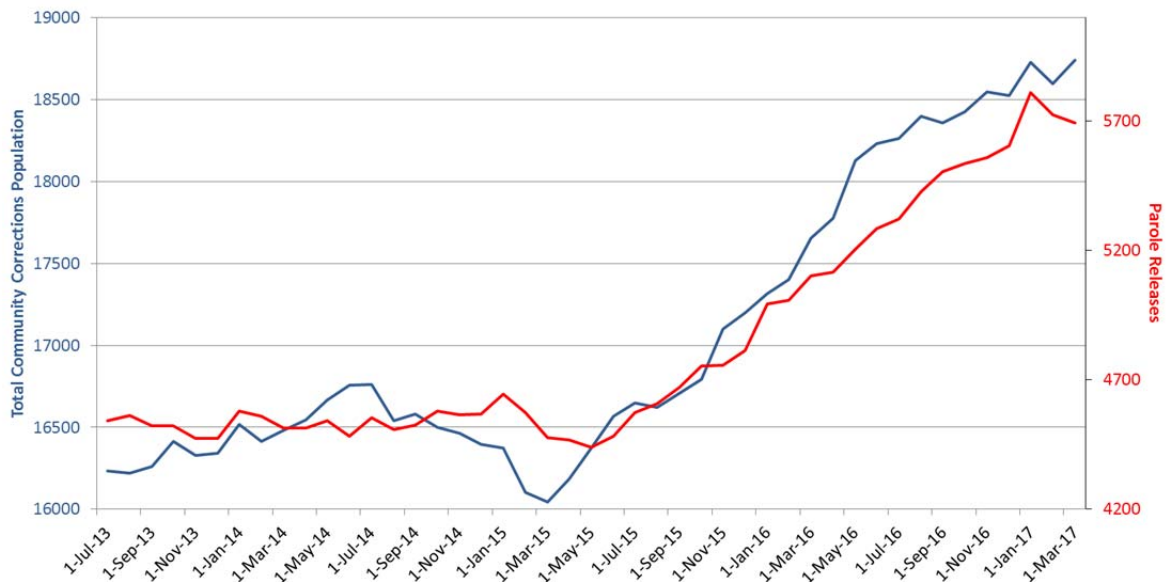


Figure 4. Total community corrections population versus parole population during the measurement period.

Figure 5 shows that there has also been an increase in the number of offenders subject to Intensive Correction Orders (ICOs) over the measurement period. The Intensive Correction Order (ICO) was introduced in June 2010 as a replacement for periodic detention. ICOs provide intensive community-based supervision and intervention for individuals whose

offending is deemed to merit a custodial sentence. Results showed the number of offenders serving an ICO rose from 952 in July 2013 to 1,773 in March 2017, representing a proportional increase of 86%.

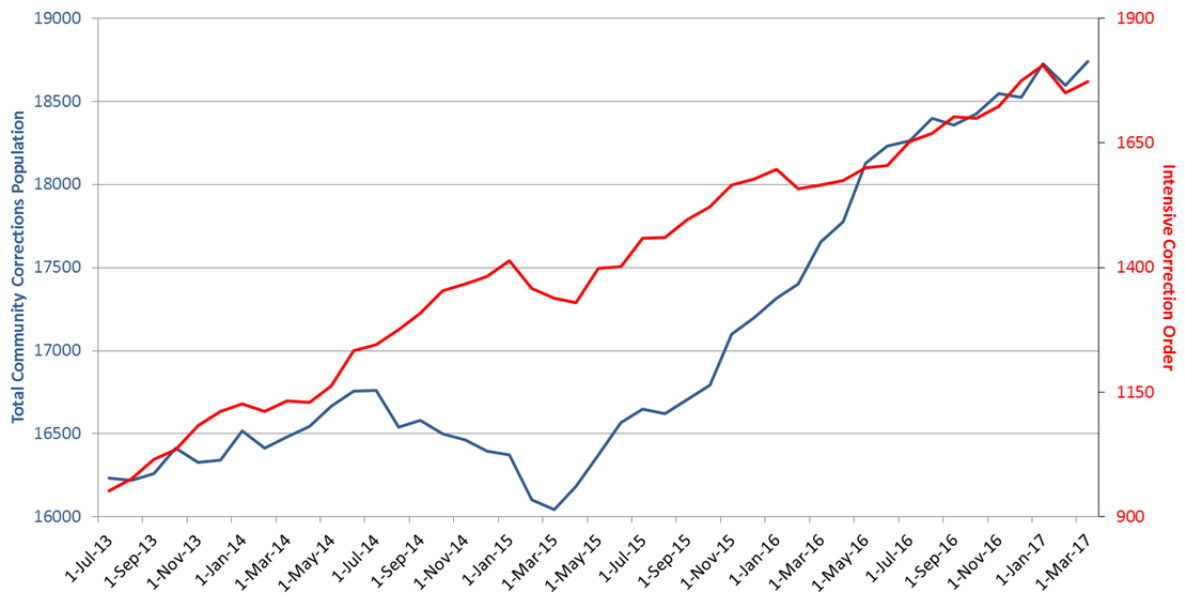


Figure 5. Total community corrections population versus the population of offenders on an ICO during the measurement period.

Figure 6 shows trends in the number of offenders being supervised on a Home Detention order. It can be seen that the number of offenders subject to this community-based sentence has increased over the measurement period. While relatively few offenders are subject to Home Detention, the number of offenders serving a Home Detention order has effectively doubled over the measurement period. It is also noted that the upward trend in Home Detention pre-dates the overall population increase.

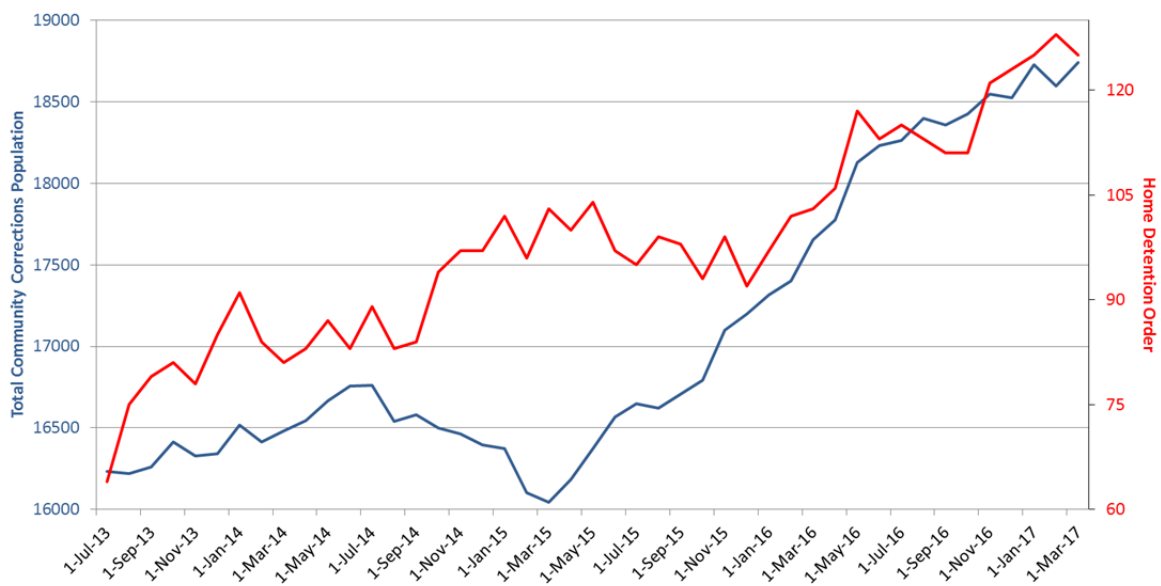


Figure 6. Total community corrections population versus the number of offenders on Home Detention during the measurement period.

An upward trend was also observed in the number of offenders receiving supervised Suspended Sentences<sup>2</sup> (Figure 7). The number of offenders being supervised on a Suspended Sentence showed growth in conjunction with the initial overall increase in the community corrections population before stabilising at a total active population of around 2,300 offenders from early 2016.

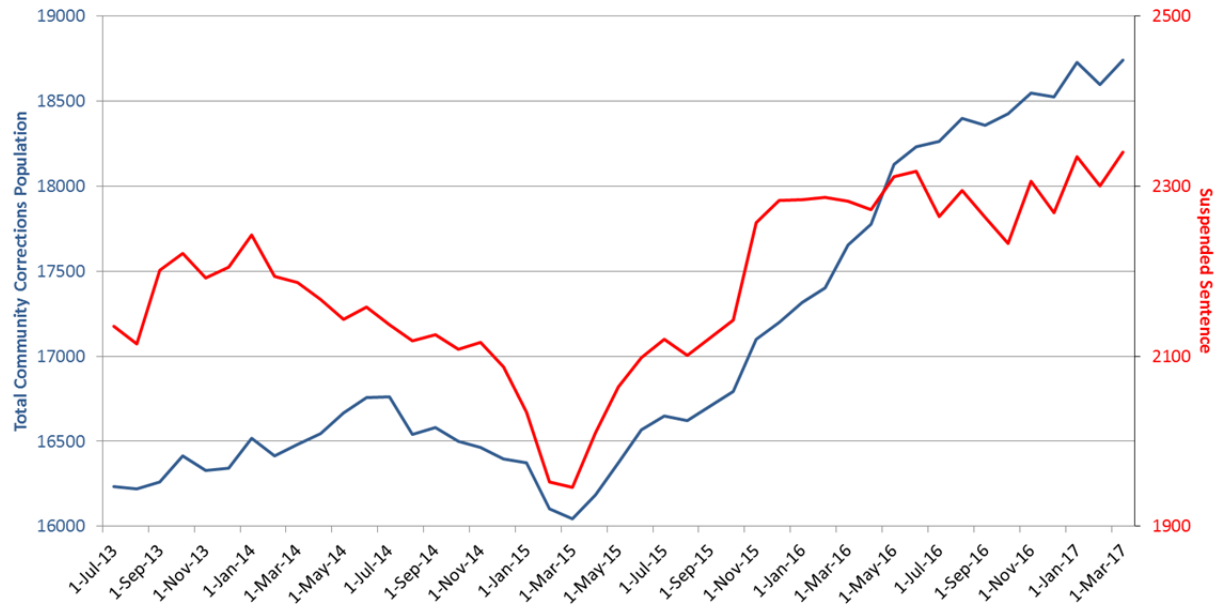


Figure 7. Total community corrections population versus the number of offenders on a Suspended Sentence Order during the measurement period.

Over the last three years, as previously mentioned, the community population increased by 17% (from 16,042 offenders in March 2015 to 18,740 offenders in March 2017, which equates to 2,698 more offenders supervised in the community). A large proportion of this increase is explained by the increment in the number of parolees (43%) and individuals receiving a Good Behaviour Bond (29%). When examining data related to the monthly caseload intakes (or new monthly registrations), findings indicated a considerable increase in the number of new registered parolees and intake of new offenders receiving Good Behaviour Bonds, Suspended Sentences and Intensive Correction Orders. These results are in line with the data reported from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), showing that between 2012 and 2016 the number of matters finalised in NSW Criminal Courts increased by 39.7% and the number of matters finalised by a sentence of imprisonment increased by 36.1% (see BOCSAR Full report: NSW Criminal Courts Statistics 2016, 2017). These data support the findings that more people are going through courts and as a consequence there is an increase in the number of individuals receiving Bonds (supervised and unsupervised), Suspended Sentences (supervised and unsupervised) and Intensive Correction Orders.

<sup>2</sup> It is noted that analyses only incorporated data on offenders with Suspended Sentences who were directed to supervision with Community Corrections. As such the data are not indicative of trends in the overall number of Suspended Sentences (which include supervised and unsupervised orders) being administered by the courts over the measurement period.

Of additional interest to this Research Digest was the degree of association between trends in the community correction population and observed recent growth in the size of the prison population. A comparison of total population trends for community-based offenders and prisoners over the measurement period is given in Figure 8.

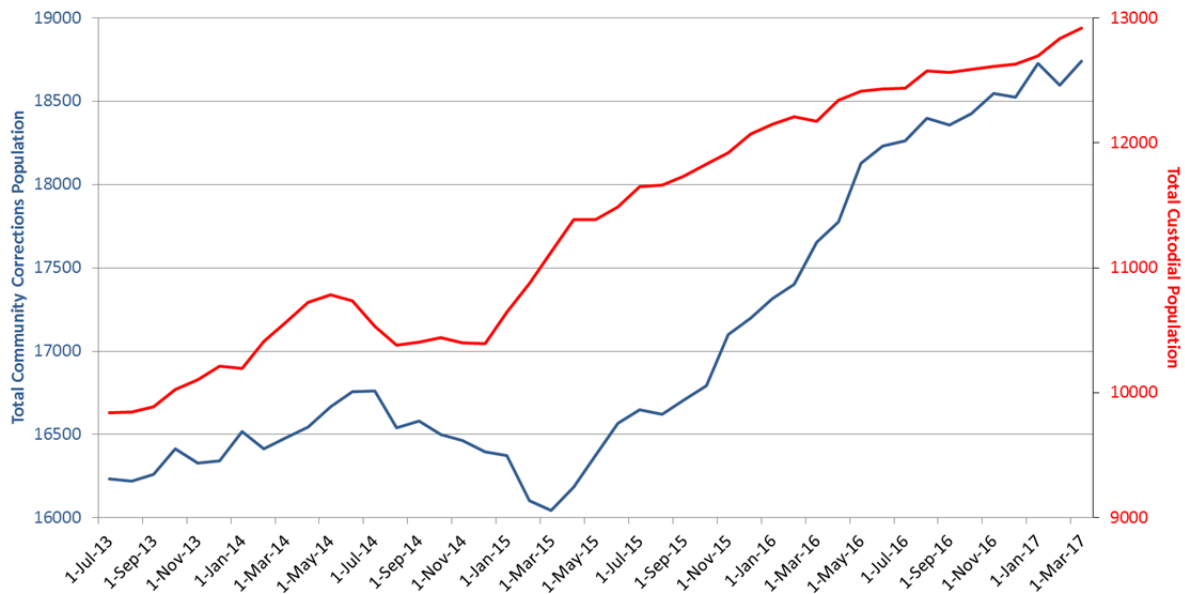


Figure 8. Comparison between the custodial and the community corrections population trends during the measurement period.

Figure 8 shows that as the custodial population grew from the beginning of 2015 there was a corresponding increase in the community corrections population. This suggests that growth in the overall community corrections population might reflect a diversion or transition process from custody to community resulting in more offenders being released to community supervision. That is, the concurrent trends point to a link between the increase in the level of imprisonment and the growth in the rate of sentences served in the community.

The relationship between custodial and community corrections populations can be considered in reference to three identified pathways by which offenders can enter supervision by Community Corrections: offenders who directly enter a community-based sentence from the community; offenders who are remanded before ultimately receiving a community-based sentence with supervision; and offenders who are released to parole after serving a custody-based sentence. For the present research, a 10 day time lapse before the order commencement date has been considered. Specifically the different pathways identified were: 1) Prior status None (individuals with no prior custodial or community episode within 10 days prior to the order commencement date); 2) Prior status Un-sentenced -Remandees (individuals with a custodial episode but no associated sentence ended within 10 days prior the commencement of the current order); and 3) Prior status Sentenced -Parolees (individuals with a custodial episode and an associated sentence ended within 10 days prior to the commencement of the current order).



Analysis of trends in these pathways indicated that over the measurement period, the number of individuals entering supervision who were “new” (prior status none within the previous 10 days) increased from 11,175 to 11,903 from July 2013 to March 2017 (representing a proportional increase of 6.5%). In contrast, the number of custody-based offenders released to parole grew from 3,996 to 5,146 (a proportional increase of 29%). In addition, the number of remandees transitioning from custody to the community after being given a community-based sentence rose from 518 to 907 over the last three years (a proportional increase of 75%). Figure 9 shows a comparison of trends in numbers of sentenced and un-sentenced offenders transitioning from custody to community over the measurement period.

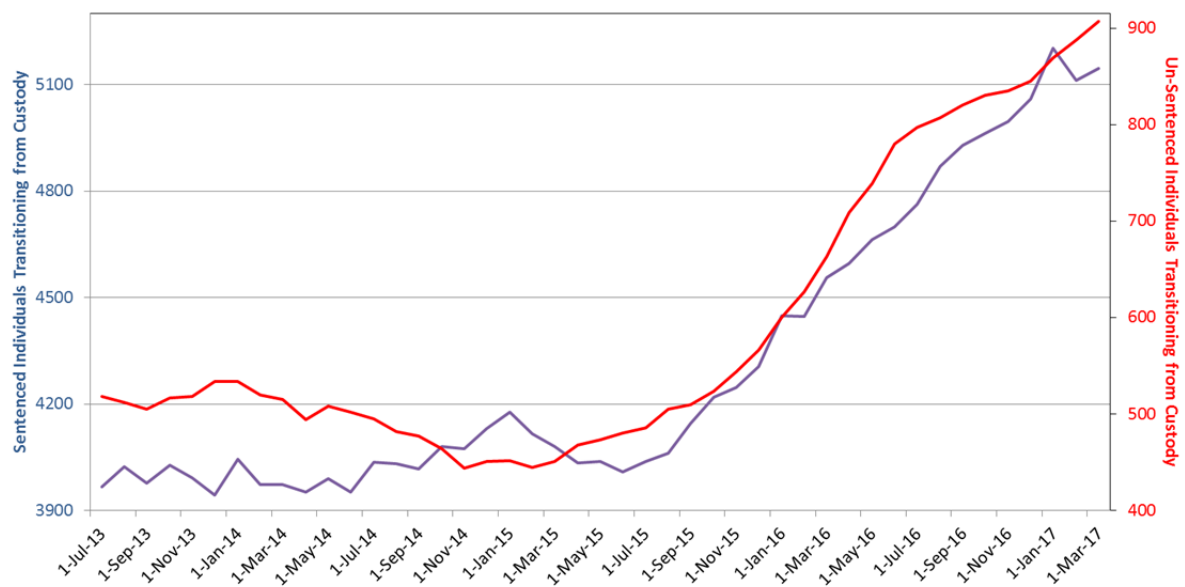


Figure 9. Number of sentenced versus un-sentenced offenders transitioning from custody to the community between July 2013 and March 2017

## CONCLUSIONS

- The community corrections population has increased rapidly over recent years, particularly over the period spanning March 2015 to March 2017. While the average time (median) spent under community supervision remained stable over time, growth trends were observed for parolees in addition to offenders receiving good behaviour bonds, suspended sentences and intensive correction orders.
- Trends in the community corrections population appear to have a temporal relationship with recent increases in the custodial population and may be related to the subsequent diversion of inmates into the community. Both the number of offenders being released to parole and the number of remandees receiving community-based sentences have increased substantially in recent years.



- In terms of absolute numbers of offenders, it appears that the primary contributor to the growth in the community corrections population is the increase in the number of good behaviour bonds and custody-based offenders being released to parole supervision. Further analyses showed that growth in the number of individuals released to parole supervision is largely driven by increases in the number of court based release parole as compared to parole at the discretion of the NSW State Parole Authority, which may reflect concurrent trends in the number of offenders given short custodial sentences.
- The data also indicate that growth in the number of various community-based sentences over recent years has been associated with the increasing prevalence of a particular pathway through the criminal justice system; namely, offenders who are initially remanded to custody before being directed to community supervision at final sentence. Further research is needed to examine whether this pattern of results reflects changes in the process by which more serious offenders proceed from initial arrest to a final community-based sentence, or potentially an impact of remand policy on the likelihood that offenders receive more intensive community-based orders.
- While the number of offenders under community supervision is currently at historically high levels, it is noted that similar population sizes were a relatively stable feature of the Community Corrections caseload 13 years ago (e.g. 2004 to 2009). In this regard it is possible that recent growth represents a correction in long term trends following a relatively anomalous decline between 2010 and 2015. Further study is required to better understand causal influences of both upward and downward trends in the community corrections population over time, and whether there are unique contributing factors to the observed recent growth in particular.



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